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EDITED BY

STEVEN J. VENTURINO

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APPROACHING CONTEMPORARY TIBETAN LITERATURE

STEVEN J. VENTURINO (LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO)

This volume attests to the continued growth of Tibetan literary studies as a field that both complements and challenges existing areas of humanistic scholarship. For the Tibetan specialist, this expansion highlights the degree to which already existing literary studies—of religious texts or the Gesar epic, for example—are being joined by studies of contemporary literature to form a body of research as unique, challenging, and multilingual as Tibetan culture itself. For the non-specialist, including myself, Tibetan literature is simply bursting into the fields of comparative and world literature in ways that suggest unique opportunities for twenty-first–century literary scholarship. The essays in this volume, most of which were first presented in Oxford at the 10th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies (2003), range from specialised studies in literary criticism and history to surveys of emerging Tibetan literature and individual readings of works. In this, the volume offers a glimpse of the rapidly expanding Tibetan literary world.

It was literature, more than a decade ago, that first drew me to the periphery of the Tibetan Studies circle, because it is the nature of literature to reach out to the non-specialist teacher, student, critic—as well as the often forgotten ordinary reader—around the world. Specialised Tibetological studies of history, culture, or religion circulate in valuable ways, to be sure, but when literature circulates, it draws people in by building its own bridges and creating new spaces for dialogue, challenge, appreciation, and possibility. In this way, contemporary Tibetan literary studies help to illuminate the always intermingling phenomena of artistic expression, history, politics, and the imagination.

In their 1996 volume, *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson describe a body of literature that spans some 1,300 years. From this broad perspective, Cabezón and Jackson identify three principal characteristics of development that have shaped Tibetan literature over the centuries, characteristics that

speak to matters of literary form, political representation, and cultural identity:

> In short, the development of Tibetan literature is marked by the increasing dominance of written over oral forms, of Indian over indigenous influences, and of religious over secular concerns, but the dominant development never has entirely eclipsed its counterpart—and orality, native themes and styles, and non-religious concerns have continued to find an important place in the literary tradition.[1]

While still near the beginning of a new era of Tibetan literature, we find contemporary Tibetan texts—by most accounts emerging only since the 1980s—prompting new, parallel questions. What are the current forces at work on Tibetan literature? How are written forms evolving in a world in which Tibetan writers compose not only in Tibetan, but in Chinese, English, and many other languages? How do Tibetan film and music influence oral forms of poetry and prose? Where the Indianisation of Tibetan culture is central to many studies of early periods of Tibetan history, we are now also invited to inquire into the more recent forces of globalisation, sinification, and Americanisation, and even into those types of 'Indianisation' owing more to Salman Rushdie or Bollywood than to Padmasambhava or the Kavyadarsa.

Moreover, contemporary Tibetan literature prompts us to reconsider the very notion of 'indigenous' versus 'foreign' influences. What is a 'native' Tibetan theme for a Tibetan literature emerging from Lanzhou, Beijing, London, or San Francisco? Of course, these are not rhetorical questions, but the very engines of literary art. Asking about the role of religion in contemporary Tibetan literature, for example, does not lead us to a cagey simplistic paradox or a single answer with regard to the movement toward or away from traditional modes of writing, but necessarily engages the reader as well as the writer in the varying and conflicting stands taken in depicting religion in narratives of national, cultural, or spiritual identity.

Approaches to contemporary Tibetan literature naturally intersect with existing approaches to other bodies of literature. For the Tibetan specialist who brings research in multiple languages together for new investigations, Tibetan literature significantly contributes to the field of comparative literature, which Mary Louise Pratt calls "the home for polyglots", where "multilingualism and polyglossia . . . remain its call-

[1] Cabezón and Jackson 1996: 16.

ing card".[2] Viewed from another perspective, contemporary Tibetan literature also suggests what Emily Apter considers comparative literature's 'disciplinary usurpation' by postcolonial studies: "With its interrogation of cultural subjectivity and attention to the tenuous bonds between identity and national language, postcolonialism quite naturally inherits the mantle of comparative literature's historical legacy".[3]

The consequences of comparative study necessarily include the hybridisation of literature so evident in modernity and postmodernity around the world. Tsering Shakya points out that Tibetan writers in China, while bilingual, also participate in interpretive acts more closely related to readings in 'world literature':

> Contemporary Tibetan writers demonstrate considerable knowledge of Western literature, albeit read in Chinese translations. They are familiar with, and quote copiously, the works of great nineteenth-century French, Russian, and English realist writers such as Guy de Maupassant, Nikolai Gogol, and Charles Dickens.[4]

What is true of Tibetan writers and readers of sinophone texts is also true of others who find their comparative, multilingual studies subject to the resources of translated works:

> As comparative literature engages with the three processes of globalization, democratization, and decolonization, the effect is a broadening of subject matter with calls for shifts, among other things, in priorities and modes of accountability. . . . There are things that can only be done via translation which are too valuable and important not to do.[5]

For readers of works in translation—whether these are Tibetan texts translated into other languages or 'Tibetan' texts translated into Tibetan—recent approaches to world literature seek to ensure that studies of this sort do not degenerate into a meaningless exercise, but serve as a way of sharing genuine and diverse approaches to literary scholarship:

> Properly understood, world literature is not at all fated to disintegrate into the conflicting multiplicity of separate national traditions; nor, on the other hand, need it be swallowed up in the white noise that Janet Abu-Lughod has called 'global babble'. My claim is that world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circu-

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[2] Pratt 1995: 62.
[3] Apter 1995: 86.
[4] Shakya 2001: xiv.
[5] Pratt 1995: 61.

> lation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike.[6]

Any concept or program of world literature, of course, depends a great deal on how such 'worlds of literature' are mapped. Contemporary Tibetan literature highlights, among other features, a twenty-first-century awareness of place, the overlapping planes of subjective identity, historical narrative, and national citizenship that generate belonging. Katie Trumpener suggests that studies of world literature, interdependent with comparative studies, can influence the demarcation of literary and critical boundaries:

> Comparative literature retains some power to set aesthetic and intellectual agendas for the humanities as a whole—and world literature courses can potentially tilt the balance of power in the humanities from its old, implicitly Western orientation, simply by broadening students' sense of what is interesting and important to study.[7]

As I have argued at length elsewhere,[8] contemporary Tibetan literature both illustrates and extends many of the critical perspectives already at work in mapping the literary globe: it is created in different languages, circulates within and without national borders—standing as part of 'Chinese literature' on the one hand and exilic or diasporic writing on the other—and requires exchanges between scholars in differing fields in order to make the most of the conversation.

In reflecting the specialised research of members of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, this volume provides readers with opportunities to bring the voices of contemporary Tibetan literature and literary studies into their own spheres of literary appreciation and scholarship. David Damrosch has written that "the variability of a work of world literature is one of its constitutive features—one of its greatest strengths when the work is well presented and read well, and its greatest vulnerability when it is mishandled or misappropriated by its newfound foreign friends".[9] It is hoped that the following essays

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[6] Damrosch 2003: 5. A portion of Damrosch's study of world literature has also been translated into Tibetan for the Latse Library Newsletter and is available at the library's web site (www.latse.org).

[7] Trumpener 2005, np.

[8] See Venturino 2004 and 2007.

[9] Damrosch 2003: 5.

will serve as valuable guides to anyone newly arriving at Tibetan literature as well as essential reading for Tibetan literature's older friends.

The Chapters

Lauran Hartley opens the volume with a fascinating and detailed study of the concept of 'literature' itself, as it circulates in Tibetan, Chinese, and Western-language discussions, by focusing on the deployment of the term *rtsom rig* in Tibetan literary discourse. Hartley's chapter explains precisely how the term *rtsom rig* has come to be translated as 'literature' and how it has operated as part of the broader discourse of national literature. Hartley then makes the case for translating the term *snyan ngag*, considered by many by earlier scholars as the equivalent of 'literature', as the more precise term for 'poem' or *shi* (诗).

In chapter two, Françoise Robin examines the Tibetan-language literary environment in China with a specific focus on the genre of what she calls modern Tibetan biofiction. Robin's study brings several contemporary Tibetan texts into a unique new dialogue with existing questions of literary history and political narrative, arguing that recent Tibetan biofiction illustrates a new mode of exploring Tibetan identities past and present. This essay also facilitates a compelling discussion of globally circulating literary elements and their adoption and adaptation by Tibetan writers.

The next five chapters of the volume are devoted to studies of individual writers and movements. Lara Maconi's comprehensive essay offers a unique analysis of contemporary Tibetan literature emerging from Yunnan Tibetan areas. Maconi examines how China's 'Shangri-La' campaign and the tourism-based economy of the Yunnan Bde chen Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture implicate contemporary Tibetan literature in negotiations of longstanding myths involving Tibetan identity. Tsering Dhondup's essay then follows with a discussion of three contemporary Mongolian-Tibetan writers, including himself, living in Qinghai Province's Henan County. Tsering Dhondup's essay provides an authoritative yet personal view of actually existing Tibetan literary production. In chapter five, Jamyang Drakpa offers a reading of the poem, "The Young Courier Dondrup", by Blo bzang dpal 'dan, and in so doing, he introduces many of us to the features, perspectives, and methodologies of contemporary Tibetan literary criticism.

In chapter six, Patricia Schiaffini considers how 'Tibetan' literary voices are created and circulated in the PRC. Schiaffini's discussion of the sinophone writers Sebo and Tashi Dawa explores the struggles and achievements of hybrid intellectuals searching for genuine identity in the challenging context of twentieth-century China. In the next chapter, Franz Xaver Erhard offers a provocative reading of works by the Amdowan writer Ljang bu. In his essay, Erhard suggests that the literary style of magical realism provides Tibetan writers with a platform for expressing Tibetan identity within Chinese modernity. The volume then concludes with Gray Tuttle's interview with Pema Bhum, the Director of the Latse Contemporary Tibetan Cultural Library, located in New York City. In the interview, Pema Bhum not only discusses the development and activities of the library, but, as one of Tibet's premier literary critics living outside of the PRC, he offers an insightful commentary on the current state of Tibetan literature in many of its forms.

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ASCENDANCY OF THE TERM *RTSOM RIG* IN TIBETAN LITERARY DISCOURSE

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My starting point for this paper is a study published in 1996 by Dga' ba pa sangs, a professor in the Tibetan Language Department at Tibet University.[1] In his article, Dga' ba pa sangs asserts that the now popularly wielded term *rtsom rig* (usually translated in English as 'literature') was coined no more than sixty years ago. Though unable to pinpoint its very first use in the Tibetan lexicon, Dga' ba pa sangs observes that the term is a calque translation of the Chinese term *wenxue* 文学.[2] He further traces the etymology of the particle *rtsom* from its original meaning of 'to make or to do' and its appearance in the writings of Tibetan scholars since Sa skya Pandita (1182–1251) in such compound forms as *rtsom 'jug* (to engage in writing) and *rtsom pa'i rnam gzhag* (a classification of writing) or simply *rtsom* (to write). *Rig*, as Dga' ba pa sangs observes, approximates the Chinese word *xue* 学, which can render the sense of learning, knowledge, or study.

In this paper, I identify the earliest appearance of the Tibetan term *rtsom rig*, based on an examination of heretofore unconsulted sources. I then discuss its construction—not simply as a lexical term but as a discursive formation which serves to delimit an object of study and a national project. Finally, I shall suggest that as a result of the growing predominance of *rtsom rig* as a discursive concept, the Tibetan term

[1] Dga' ba pa sangs, *Rtsom rig ces pa dang der 'brel ba'i bod kyi tha snyad 'ga'i btags don la dpyad pa* (On the meaning of *rtsom rig* and several related Tibetan terms), *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal*, 1996(1): 73–78; and 1996(2): 70–74. This article was also published as *Rtsom rig ces pa dang de dang rtsa 'brel du gyur ba'i bod kyi tha snyad 'ga'i ming 'dogs kyi dpyad pa*, *Gangs ljongs rig gnas,* 1996(1): 64–74. In the latter journal, the article was included in '*Gran gleng ldum ra* (Controversy Corral), a feature section devoted to contested issues in literature or other fields. There are only minor differences between these two articles, probably due to editing decisions. I have followed the version as it appeared in *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal*.

[2] While this term has existed in the Chinese language for some 2,400 years, the current meaning of *wenxue* reflects a western understanding of literature that only came about in the early part of the twentieth century during the New Culture or May Fourth movement and later at the urging of Lao She in the 1950s (Dga' ba pa sangs 1996: 75).

snyan ngag, previously used by Tibetan scholars to describe a vast store of literary writing since the twelfth century, has now narrowed in meaning such that it more closely approximates the English term 'poem' or the contemporary sense of the Chinese term *shi* 诗.[3]

Earliest Uses of the Term *Rtsom rig*

As Dga' ba pa sangs (1996) notes, the word *rtsom rig* does not appear in the Tibetan dictionary compiled by Dge bshes chos grags in 1946 and published in 1949.[4] The earliest dictionary to include the term, according to Dga' ba pa sangs, is the 1976 edition of the *Rgya Bod shan sbyar gyi tshig mdzod* (Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary), published by the Nationalities Publishing House in Beijing. Dga' ba pa sangs hypothesises that the term *rtsom rig* was conceived by translation teams in the 1950s and the place to look for its earliest appearance would be in a translation of Mao's writings.

I undertook this project, beginning with Tibetan translations of Mao's talks, at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in May 1942. My findings here are derived from three Tibetan editions of this text: 1) the first Tibetan translation of the Yan'an Forum, published as a single volume by the Nationalities Publishing House in 1955;[5] 2) the version included in the third volume of Mao's collected speeches originally published by the Nationalities Publishing House in 1959, revised in 1965, and revised again in 1992;[6] and 3) an excerpt reprinted in an

[3] For the purposes of this paper, I shall use the following definition of 'poem': "a composition characterised by the presence of imagination, emotion, truth (significant meaning), sense impressions, and concrete language; expressed rhythmically and with an orderly arrangement of parts and possessing within itself a unity; the whole written with the dominant purpose of giving aesthetic or emotional pleasure" (Holman 1972: 399).

[4] *Dge bshes chos kyi grags pas brtsams ba'i brda dag ming tshig gsal ba*, Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House, 1985 [1957]. This Tibetan-only dictionary was originally published with woodblocks by Hor khang Bsod nams dpal 'bar in 1949. The 1985 edition also includes Chinese translations for each term.

[5] Ma'o tse tung, *Yan an du rig rtsal skor gyi bzhugs mol tshogs 'dur gnang ba'i gsung bshad*, Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House, 1955. This translation was based on the 1953 Chinese version of the talks produced by the People's Publishing House in Beijing (Renmin chubanshe). I am grateful to Pema Bhum of the Latse Contemporary Tibetan Cultural Library (NYC) for bringing this text to my attention.

[6] *Ma'o tse tung gi gsung rtsom gces bsdus* (Ch. *Mao Ze Dong xuan ji* 茅泽东选集), Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House, 1992.

unidentifiable Tibetan-language periodical (possibly *Dar dmar*) published sometime between 1974 and 1978.[7] The lexical and grammatical differences between these three versions alone merit a separate study. For example, the 1955 edition is written in a much more literary style than the 1959 version; and the 1970s text includes western style punctuation and the unvarying use of *gi* as a genitive case particle, reflecting grammatical reforms propounded during the Cultural Revolution.

The term *rtsom rig* appears in all three texts, but rarely alone. Rather, it is usually used in a compound form with *sgyu rtsal* to render *wenxue yishu* (literary arts). Interestingly, the term 'literary works' (*rtsom rigs*) in the 1992 version is rendered in the 1970s text by a Tibetan transliteration of the original Chinese term *zuopin* 作品 . This suggests that the new lexicon, though officially standardised, was not yet widespread. The clearest instance, for our purposes, occurs at a critical moment in one speech when Mao asks the question, "What is literature?"[8] In the 1992 [1959] edition the term *wenxue* was glossed as *rtsom rigs*.[9] In the 1955 translation, however, the term is rendered as *rtsom rig*. I am now quite certain that this constitutes the first appearance of the term in the Tibetan language, and it is clearly a calque of the Chinese term *wenxue*.

Confirmation that the Tibetan term *rtsom rig* was first coined in 1955 to render the Chinese term *wenxue* in Mao's speeches at Yan'an is supported by an examination of the term's first inclusion in a dictionary. When Dga' ba pa sangs pointed to the *Rgya Bod shan sbyar gyi tshig mdzod* (1976), perhaps he was not aware that the term *rtsom rig* was also included in an earlier version of the same dictionary published in 1964. The foreword of the 1964 edition suggests, however, that quasi-official sanction of the term *rtsom rig* may have been granted still earlier, as many of its terms were drawn from yet a preceding dictionary: the *Rgya Bod tha snyad gsar bsgrigs (The Chinese-Tibetan Glossary of New Terminology).*

[7] Though the text I have includes no title or publishing details, certain clues help us date it: one poem was written in March 1974; the issue opens with a quote by Mao, adhering to a policy that was stopped in 1978; and the use of *gi* as the only genitive particle confirms that this publication predates the 1980 revocation of the 'new grammar' propounded during the Cultural Revolution.

[8] Ch. Shenme shi wenxue 文学. Mao raises this question in his speech on 23 May 1942.

[9] Though usually reluctant to dismiss such anomalies as typographical errors, I think it probable in this case.

The *Rgya Bod tha snyad gsar bsgrigs* was the first Chinese-Tibetan glossary of the Communist era, and was produced and distributed in four parts by the Nationalities Publishing House from 1954 (just three years after the founding of this important publishing centre) through 1957.[10] The team of scholars who compiled these four volumes sought to standardise the plethora of new Tibetan terms being coined by various translators and in a multitude of contexts. The team combed through recent Tibetan translations of Chinese documents from across the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC) to identify new lexical terms and to determine a standard gloss for each item. They noted, for example, that the term *qin lüe* 侵略 (invasion or aggression) had been translated in some eleven different ways.[11] Each volume sought to complement the preceding volumes by examining additional sources. In some cases, lexical terms asserted in an earlier volume were revised. Such was the situation for the term *rtsom rig*.

We can confidently assert that the Tibetan term *rtsom rig* was first standardised in December 1957 in the fourth volume of the *Rgya Bod tha snyad gsar bsgrigs*.[12] Fortunately, this volume includes precise information regarding the source of each entry; and the term *rtsom rig* was drawn from page 25 of the Tibetan translation of Mao's speeches at Yan'an, as published by the Nationalities Publishing House in 1955. Significantly, the term *rtsom rig* does not appear in the first three volumes (published in 1954, 1955, and May 1957, respectively.) On the contrary, the term *wenxue* is glossed in volume one as "*yig rig*" and a writer or man of letters (Ch. *wenxue jia*) was dubbed a "*yig rig pa*". As time has demonstrated, neither term ever gained popularity. Nor does the word *rtsom rig* appear in a handwritten dictionary reproduced by cyclostyle and distributed by the same publishing house in September 1956.[13]

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[10] Copies of this dictionary are extremely scarce. I am grateful to 'Brug mo skyid, editor at the Nationalities Publishing House (Beijing), who at my request located this book in their archives.

[11] Introduction, *Rgya Bod tha snyad gsar bsgrigs*, Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House, 1954(1): 3.

[12] Although *wenxue* is not listed separately, it appears in the compound word wenx*ue yishu* 学艺 (literary arts; *rtsom rig sgyu rtsal*). This is how the term most commonly appears in Mao's speeches, which likely informed the initial tendency to use *rtsom rig* only in its compound form, as discussed below.

[13] *Rgya Bod ming tshig gi dpyad gzhi phyogs bsdus*, 1956. I am grateful to 'Brug mo skyid at the Nationalities Publishing House for alerting me to the existence of this volume.

The reader may wonder if this term had been used during the Nationalist period or among Tibetans living in India. According to my research, however, this seems improbable for several reasons. First, the term *rtsom rig* does not appear in the *Zang Han xiao ci dian* (*Tibetan-Chinese Pocket Dictionary*) published under the Guomindang in 1948 [1932]. Second, it is not listed in any of the early dictionaries published by Westerners; e.g., *Körös* (1834), *Jäschke* (1882) or *Buck* (1969). Third, it cannot be found in early dictionaries published in India; e.g., *Sarat Chandra Das* (1902), *Lokesh Chandra* (1961), and *Brag g.yab Blo ldan shes rab* (1966). Most telling is that in his *An English-Tibetan Dictionary* (1919) published in Calcutta, Dawasamdup (*Zla ba bsam 'grub*) Kazi (1868-1922) translated the English term 'literature' as follows: "*yi ge* [writings]; *bstan bcos yi ge* [treatise writing]; *chos* [works]; *rig pa* [science or culture]".[14]

The first instance of the term's appearance outside of the People's Republic of China seems to be in Dhongthog Rinpoche's *New Light Tibetan-English Dictionary*, published in 1973.[15] I questioned Dhongthog Rinpoche about the sources he used for compiling his dictionary. He acknowledged that many of the scientific or more contemporary terms came from a Chinese-Tibetan dictionary that had been published in Beijing and supplied to him by Stag lha Phun tshogs bkra shis, a cabinet minister in the Tibetan government in exile.[16]

We can thus trace the origins of the Tibetan term *rtsom rig* back to 1955, when it was coined for rendering the term *wenxue* in Mao's talks at Yan'an. Its first appearance in a glossary only in 1957 further supports this claim. Widespread use of the term, however, was not immediate. The *Rgya Bod ming mdzod*, a Tibetan-Chinese dictionary compiled by the Tibetan Language Department of Northwest Nationalities Institute in 1963 and reprinted in 1979 includes only the term *rtsom rigs* ('literary-type [works]'; Ch. *wenxue zuopin*), not the term *rtsom rig* (Ch. *wenxue*). This further supports our hypothesis that the term was developed for the purpose of translating Chinese writings into Tibetan, and not to render an indigenous concept. With the widespread distribu-

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14 Zla ba bsam 'grub, 1919: 443. I have included more literal translations in brackets in order to contrast the sense of these terms.

15 I am grateful to Tsering Shakya for informing me of this reference.

16 Dhongthog Rinpoche, telephone interview, 14 June 2004.

tion of the second *Rgya Bod shan sbyar tshig mdzod* (1976) after the Cultural Revolution, the term *rtsom rig* eventually became more standard.

Rtsom rig as a Discursive Concept

In the early 1980s, the term *rtsom rig* was often used in conjunction with *sgyu rtsal*, to render the Chinese term *wenxue yishu* (literary arts). The most obvious instance can be found in the title of the first Tibetan-language literary journal *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* (*Tibetan Literature and Arts*), founded in Lhasa in 1980. This compound usage was far more prevalent, even in the 1950s, than was the use of the term *rstom rig* alone.[17] In fact, the construction of *rtsom rig* itself as a discursive category, figures very little in the earliest instances of modern Tibetan literary scholarship, except in official circles and proceedings. This point became apparent to me when for the purposes of my dissertation I launched a survey of Tibetan-medium literary criticism from the early 1980s.[18]

First, let us recall that Tibetan *snyan ngag* (Skt. *kāvya*), by Daṇḍin's definition, contains three classes of writing: verse (Tib. *tshigs bcad*, Skt. *padya*), prose (Tib. *lhug*; Skt. *gadya*) and mixed prose with mingled verse (Tib. *tshig bcad lhug spel ma*, Skt. *campü*). This broader understanding of *snyan ngag* might be best glossed as 'belles-lettres', the term preferred by Leonard van der Kuijp (1996) and the understanding that seems to have prevailed among Tibetan scholars who bridged the transition from the pre-1950s to the early post-Mao period.[19] For example, Tshe tan zhabs drung when drafting his *Snyan ngag spyi don*

[17] See n. 1.

[18] The journals I examined include nearly the entire runs of *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* (Tibetan Literature and Arts), *Sbrang char* (Light Rain), *Zla zer* (Moonshine), *Bod ljongs zhib 'jug* (Tibetan Studies), *Krung go'i Bod kyi shes rig* (China's Tibetology), and scattered issues of various local literary magazines.

[19] In contemporary Tibetan literary criticism, the classical definition of *snyan ngag* most frequently cited is a phrase for which I have been unable to find the original source: "the mellifluous and charming joining of words" (*rna bar snyan zhing yid dbang 'phrog pa'i tshig sbyor*). Kun dga' 1996: 70, for example, states "*khong rnam pas snyan ngag gi mtshan nyid de rna bar snyan zhing yid dbang 'phrog pa'i tshig sbyor tsam gyi thog tu bzhag yod pa la ma gros gcig mthun lta bu'i dgongs pa gtad 'dug /*" (They [earlier scholars] unanimously agree that the definition of *snyan ngag* is nothing but the mellifluous and charming joining of words.)

(Summary of The Mirror of Poetry) in 1952,[20] argued that if the prose form (*lhug*) of *snyan ngag* is considered, then the territory covered by the term *snyan ngag* is vast:

> If one considers snyan ngag to be merely metric verse, prose and mixed writing (*camp*), it is still too narrow. In addition, when one is writing a meaningful speech amidst a gathering of scholars, teaching the sciences among the people, teaching hardworking students, debating one's opponent by retort and critique, satire and one-upping for the purpose of cutting through to the meaning at hand, and even [recording] conversation and the expression of friendship between friends,—if any of these have the following characteristics: smoothly worded without the fault of contradictions, easily understood by any thinking being, untarnished by coarse or common speech which is unfitting for gatherings, and so forth, then the aesthetic experience (*nyams*) of *snyan ngag* will be effortlessly produced.[21]

This book was extremely influential, especially among Tibetan students at the nationalities institutes in Xining and Lanzhou.

Rdo rje rgyal po, whose textbook on *snyan ngag* was published in 1983, but drafted in the 1960s, shares a similar understanding: "Whatever meaning expressed—whether it be large or small—if its expression is not ordinary but rather particularly sublime, then it comprises *snyan ngag*".[22] Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las (1982 [1962]) defines *snyan ngag* using contemporary terms:

> *Snyan ngag* is a [piece of] writing in which the author expresses in written form his own thoughts on his impressions of many real-life phenom-

[20] This book was first published by the Qinghai People's Publishing House in 1957 with a print run of 2050 copies. When the book was released again by Gansu Nationalities Publishing House after the Cultural Revolution in 1981, 22,000 copies were printed.

[21] Tshe tan zhabs drung, *Snyan ngag spyi don*, 4–5. Tib. *de yang snyan ngag ces pa tshig bcad lhug spel ma'i rtsom tsam la go bar byas na da dung khyab chungs ches pas / de dag las gzhan mkhas pa'i dkyil 'khor gdan 'dzoms pa'i dbus su don dang ldan pa'i 'bel gtam byed pa / skye bo mang po'i khrom du gtsug lag las drangs pa'i gzhung 'chad pa don gnyer dang ldan pa'i slob bu rnams la gzhung khrid byed pa / phas kyi rgol ba la brgal zhing brtag pa'i sgo nas rtsod pa byed pa / skabs bab kyi don dmigs phug pa'i ched du zur za dang shags 'gyed byed pa / tha na grogs phan tshun mdza' 'dris kyi kun slong mtshon pa'i slad du mol mchid dang / rang tshig snga phyi 'brel chags pa tshig don gyi cha la skyon med pa / blo dang ldan pa sus kyang go sla ba / tshogs par dbyung du mi rung ba'i grong skad dam phal skad kyis ma bslad pa sogs gong smos khyad chos de dag tshang ba zhig yin na ni snyan ngag gi nyams rtsol med du 'thon par 'gyur la /*

[22] Rdo rje rgyal po, *Snyan ngag gi rnam bshad gsal sgron*, 26. Tib. *brjod bya'i don che phra gang zhig yin rung rjod byed ngag gi sbyor ba tha mal pa las khyad du 'phags pa zhig yin na snyan ngag yin pas khyab /*

> ena in the environment where he resides and [it is] an art which surpasses that real life and is concisely expressed.[23]

These examples suggest that a broader understanding of the term *snyan ngag* as 'belles-lettres' was still dominant in the early 1980s. From the perspective of these scholars the term *rtsom rig* was an awkward if not superfluous rendering of the vast writing styles already covered by the term *snyan ngag*, at least in *kāvya* theory if not in practice. (In practice, commentaries and illustrations of Tibetan belles-lettres were almost solely focused on metric verse.) Indeed, I could find no use of the term *rtsom rig* in any of the three books just mentioned, which were the most widely disseminated Tibetan literary textbooks even through the mid and late 1980s.[24] Instead, the older generation scholars simply refer to 'writing' (*rtsom* or *rtsom pa*). One also occasionally finds the term '*rtsom yig*' (literary work) in these texts.

A survey of the earliest articles in Tibetan-language literary journals from 1980 further reveals that the term *rtsom rig*—outside of its use as a compound in *rtsom rig sgyu rtsal*—had not gained much currency. The sole title containing the term *rtsom rig* is an article by Chab spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs[25] in *Bod ljongs mang tshogs sgyu rtsal*, 1980.[26] In the 1990s, by contrast, the term *rtsom rig* could easily appear a dozen times in article titles for any given journal in a single year.

Younger scholars too made only spare reference to *rtsom rig* in the early 1980s. One of Don grub rygal's earliest pieces of literary criticism published in a journal is about *rtsom rig sgyu rtsal*, not literature per se.[27] Similarly, in the full two hundred pages of a master's thesis by Sangs rgyas (later chief editor at the Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House and now an administrator at the Qinghai Nationalities Institute), completed in 1981 and published in 1983, the term appears only twice and its use is inconsistent.[28] He describes his thesis not as a project for

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[23] Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las, *Snyan ngag la 'jug tshul tshig rgyan rig pa'i sgo 'byed,* 5. Tib. *snyan ngag ni / rtsom pa po des rang nyid gnas pa'i khor yug gi 'tsho ba dngos kyi snang tshul mang po rang nyid kyi bsam blor 'char ba de gzugs su 'god pa'i rnam pa'i thog nas rang nyid kyi bsam tshul mtshon pa byed pa'i rtsom zhig dang 'tsho ba ngos de las tshad mtho zhing gcig bsdus rang bzhin ldan pa'i rig rtsal zhig yin /*

[24] Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las (1982) even includes a syllabus on how to teach *snyan ngag* at the back of his book.

[25] Chab spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs 1980: 71–73.

[26] I am grateful to Tashi Tsering of Amnye Machen Institute (Dharamsala for providing me with a copy of this article.

[27] Rang grol 1982: 48–50.

[28] Sangs rgyas uses the term to argue against the idea that all literary forms (*rtsom*

developing Tibetan literature (*rtsom rig*), but for developing Tibetan culture (*rig gnas)* in general. In Don grub rgyal's published response to Sangs rgyas' thesis, the discussion again remains strictly within a *snyan ngag*-centred discourse. No mention is made of a collective notion of *rtsom rig*. Don grub rgyal argues that Tibet needs its own indigenous treatise on rhetoric,[29] not a unique literary theory such as is argued in later years. Likewise, Tibetan critics in the early 1980s were apt to employ poetic concepts to discuss prose literature, a phenomenon that occurred in the early development of Western literary criticism.[30]

In contrast to China, where modern literary criticism was engendered by the establishment of a liberal public sphere during the late imperial period (Zhang 1997), initial efforts to foster a 'new literature' in Tibetan represented a close alliance between the state and members of the new Tibetan intelligentsia. For example, the first Conference on Tibetan New Literature[31] (*Bod kyi rtsom rig gsar rtsom*),[32] convened in

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rig gi rnam pa) should be considered *snyan ngag*. (Sangs rgyas 1983: 28) Elsewhere, he argues that *snyan ngag* is a form of writing (*snyan ngag ni rtsom gyi rnam pa zhig*).

[29] Tib. *Bod la rang gi khyad chos dang mthun pa'i tshig rgyan rig pa'i bstan bcos shig yod dgos /*

[30] "The origins of criticism in Greece are deeply bound up with poetry, for it is in response to poetry that many of the fundamental doctrines of ancient literary criticism are formulated, and it is in poetry that the impulse to criticism first manifests itself" (Murray 2000[1965], viii).

Several factors reinforced the tendency to use poetic concepts in the Tibetan case. First, the vocabulary of *snyan ngag* was the most familiar conceptual storehouse for discussing writing due to the plethora of *snyan ngag* related texts published after 1976 and the instruction of *snyan ngag* in many secondary and undergraduate minority institutes. Secondly, the influence of Russian formalism available through Chinese translation may have reinforced the tendency to evaluate prose writing in poetic or formal terms. Terry Eagleton has described this approach: "When the Formalists came to consider prose writing, they often simply extended to it the kinds of technique they had used with poetry. But literature is usually judged to contain much besides poetry—to include, for example, realist or naturalistic writing which is not linguistically self-conscious or self-exhibiting in any striking way. People sometimes call writing 'fine' precisely because it *doesn't* draw undue attention to itself" (Eagleton 1996[1983]: 5–6). Finally, the formulation of popular Chinese literary theory, which was being taught by Chinese literature professors to Tibetan students in nationality institutes starting from 1977, shared similarities with the Tibetan concept of *snyan ngag*. In particular, the concept of 'fine imagery' has a close affinity with *kāvya* theory, as it suggests that literature should be comprised of a series of pictures (*huamian* 画面). Thus, the writer would use imagery to describe or illustrate the emotions of a character, for example, in a story. In the same vein, theatrically derived *kāvya* theory categorises the emotions one should depict (*'gyur*) in order to elicit a particular emotional experience in the reader (*nyams*). (Pema Bhum, interview, 10 February 2001).

[31] Tib. *Bod kyi rtsom rig gsar rtsom gyi bzhugs mol tshogs 'dus.*

[32] An alternative reference was *bod kyi rtsom rig gsar ba.*

Xining in August 1981, is one of the first instances of the designation 'Tibetan new literature'.[33] Here the idea of a new Tibetan literature (*Bod kyi rtsom rig gsar rtsom*) was most probably borrowed from the Chinese concept of 'New Literature' (*xin wenxue*), a term coined in the 1930s when essays identifying the emergence of a 'new literature' in China first appeared.[34] In October 1981, a similar conference to promote the development of a modern Tibetan literature was held in Lhasa—the First Conference of Literary Arts Personnel in the TAR.[35]

As was the case in China, Tibetan literary discussions were soon "deeply involved with the questions of the nation"[36]—a turn portended by Don grub rgyal's 1984 query: "Why can't we write a Tibetan *Kāvyādarśa?*"[37] Contemporary Tibetan scholars had to grapple not only with the relation of their writing to Indic models (as did their predecessors), but also to its status *vis à vis* Chinese and western contemporaries. In my dissertation, I discuss in greater detail two debates among scholars beginning in the late 1980s which were expressly concerned with the construction of a national literature and which thus served to carve out the space constituted by 'literature' (*rtsom rig*) and to thus mediate the production and consumption of Tibetan literature:[38] 1) the debate over the criteria for defining 'Tibetan literature'—most famously prompted by discussions at a Tibetology conference in Lhasa in 1986 and waning in print only around 1995; and 2) the debate over periodisation, starting in 1988, which aimed to found a unique narrative of the historical trajectory of 'Tibetan literature'. Like their Chinese counterparts in the late 1980s, several Tibetan scholars urged that the criteria for delineation should rely on literary developments, in contrast to political delimiters. In this aspect, their project shares similarities with

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[33] Fascinating details on the activities of the earliest translation teams and the latter initiatives by Tibetan intellectuals to promote Tibetan literature can be found in the autobiography of a former employee of the Nationalities Publishing House: Jiangbian Jiacuo 降边嘉措('Jam dpal rgya mtsho), *Ganxie shenghuo: Wo he wode changbian xiaoshuo Gesang meiduo* 感谢 生活 我 和 我的长篇小说 "格桑梅朵" (Thankful Life: Me and My Full-Length Novel *Skal bzang me tog*). Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2000.

[34] Zhang 1994: 351.

[35] Tib. *Bod rang skyong ljongs rtsom rig sgyu rtsal las don pa'i 'thus mi tshogs chen theng dang po*.

[36] Zhang 1997: 47. See Brennan 1990 and my discussion in Hartley 2003 regarding links between literary criticism and nationalism among English, Irish, and African intellectuals.

[37] Don grub rgyal 1984(2): 84.

[38] Hartley 2003: chapter 6.

the Romantic view of late 18th century Europe when “literature was profoundly aware of its own position in history, and in a specifically literary history”.[39] Even the term *bod kyi rtsom rig* (Tibetan literature) was not firmly standardised until 1990 or 1991.

As the term *rtsom rig* gained currency in the late 1980s and students had greater access to Western literary theory, this raised certain questions regarding classical Tibetan writing. Should certain genres of premodern writing be classified as ‘*rtsom rig*’? Are ‘*snyan ngag*’ and ‘*rtsom rig*’ mutually exclusive categories? Is one a sub-category of the other? From 1988, a flurry of articles began to address these questions.[40] Generally speaking, leading scholars argued that ‘*snyan ngag*’ and ‘*rtsom rig*’ were two terms for the same literary phenomenon. For instance, Tshe rdor—currently vice-chairman of the TAR Writers Union[41]—unequivocally asserted that “*snyan ngag* and *rtsom rig* do not differ, the two signify the same meaning”.[42] He argued that a contemporary literary theory “with Tibetan characteristics” could only be based on the *Snyan ngag me long*.[43] Tshe rdor’s rhetorical strategy is to frame basic Western literary theory in classical Tibetan terms. For instance, he explains the contemporary phrase ‘artistic language’ as being “the rich joining of words (*tshig sbyor*) achieved through poetic figures (*rgyan*), synonymy (*mngon brjod*), metrics (*sdeb sbyor*), conciseness (*tshig sdud*), and so forth”. He refers solely to classical Tibetan works and, aside from the Russian critic Belinksy, Tshe rdor cites for authority only deceased or older-generation Tibetan scholars.[44] He quotes no Chinese writers or critics.

The following year, Reb gong Rdo rje mkhar also argued that *snyan ngag* was identical to *rtsom rig*,[45] a position he maintained even in 1994.[46] To make his case in the 1994 article, however, he (or perhaps the journal editor?) erroneously misquotes Dung dkar blo bzang ’phrin las,

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[39] Colebrook 1997 : 13.

[40] And the discussion returned with fresh vigour in the late 1990s.

[41] Tib. *Bod ljongs rtsom pa po mthun tshogs*. Information provided in *Krung go’i Bod kyi shes rig*, 1999(3): 77–86.

[42] Tshe rdor 1988(5): 85.

[43] *ibid.*: 79.

[44] E.g., Khams sprul Rinpoche (1730-1779/80), ’Ju Mi pham rnam rgyal (1846-1912), the fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682), Tshe tan zhabs drung (1910-85), Dung dkar Blo bzang ’phrin las (1927-97), and Bse tshang Rinpoche (b. 1938).

[45] Reb gong Rdo rje mkhar 1989: 51–64.

[46] Reb gong Rdo rje mkhar 1994: 76–88.

claiming that the elder scholar himself equates *snyan ngag* and *rtsom rig*. Yet, as we noted above the term '*rtsom rig*' does not appear in Dung dkar Rinpoche's text. In short, where Dung dkar Rinpoche refers to *snyan ngag* as 'a writing' (*rtsom zhig*), he is erroneously quoted in Rdo rje mkhar's article as stating that "*snyan ngag ni rtsom rig cig yin /* ".[47] The elision is a small but significant one which effectively changes the understanding of *snyan ngag* from 'a type of writing' to 'a literature'. While the error may have been inadvertent, I believe this incident demonstrates the shift in thinking that had occurred in the intervening fourteen years—that is, the ascendancy of the term '*rtsom rig*' into literary discourse, including discussions of poetry.

EMERGENCE OF A *RTSOM RIG*-CENTRED DISCOURSE

Only in the 1990s does the evaluation of literature in poetic terms shift to a discourse in which Western literary theory (as received and translated by Chinese literary scholars) is more central and used to define 'literature'. Rebkong-based Seng gshong Rdo rje gcod pa (1990) defines *rtsom rig* as a 'means of communication' and 'a representation of social life'.[48] His emphasis is on clarity and the reader's ability to understand and he thus protests the development of obscure poetry (*go dka' ba'i snyan ngag*). At the same time, he criticises classical Tibetan literature—especially moralistic genres inspired by Buddhist *avadāna*—for being too simplistic and inferior in terms of literary quality:

> Unfortunately, Tibetan literature includes a host of works that serve as models for the purpose of directly transmitting many concepts from Buddhist texts that have influenced the world, but these works do not manifest many qualities found in genuine literature.[49]

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47 *snyan ngag ni / rtsom pa po des rang nyid gnas pa'i khor yug gi 'tsho ba dngos kyi snang tshul mang po rang nyid kyi bsam blor 'char ba de gzugs su 'god pa'i rnam pa'i thog nas rang nyid kyi bsam tshul mtshon pa byed pa'i [rtsom rig cig yin] /* Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las *op. cit.*: 5; cited in Reb gong Rdo rje mkhar *op. cit.*: 81. I have bracketed the misprepresented phrase which originally read "*rtsom zhig dang 'tsho ba ngos de las tshad mtho zhing gcig bsdus rang bzhin ldan pa'i rig rtsal zhig yin*". In the original quote, Dung dkar Rinpoche refers to *snyan ngag* as "a writing" (*rtsom zhig*) and "an art" (*rig rtsal zhig*). However, he never actually uses the term 'literature' (*rtsom rig*), such as Reb gong Rdo rje mkhar claims.

48 Seng gshong Rdo rje gcod pa 1990: 72.

49 *ibid.*: 77.

His concern with the nationality is prominent and his reasoning is based mostly on elementary Western literary theory, with frequent reference to the various elements of literature: character, environment or setting, theme, etc. While Rdo rje gcod pa mentions *snyan ngag* it does not figure prominently in his discussion.

In another article from 1990, Gnam lha rgyal (1990) is primarily discussing *snyan ngag*, but defines it using modern terms and clearly states that it is a special type of literature.[50] "*Snyan ngag* is a literature that is rich with strong emotion and romanticism. Its main ability is to express the salt, sweet and bitter [aspects] of life".[51] He argues against the classical position which privileges 'mellifluous quality' as the defining characteristic. In his view, "it is not appropriate to define *snyan ngag* by merely pleasant wording". His article draws heavily on nationalist and realist conceptual structures.

At the same time, there was a growing tendency, especially among younger scholars, to see *snyan ngag* as comprising metric verse only. Dpal lha mo (1997), an editor at *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* and a poet in her own right,[52] argues that *snyan ngag* should be defined as a literary genre in which the writer conveys a mental image to the reader in order to evoke the strong emotion felt by the writer, and he/she does this by linking sound and emotion. To support her argument, she draws primarily on the authority of Dor zhi and 'Ju skal bzang, as well as Western writers and the twentieth-century Chinese critic Zheng Min 郑敏 (b. 1920).[53] For this editor, *snyan ngag* is the same as the Chinese *shi* and the English 'poem',[54] distinguished not by its mellifluous quality and poetic figures, but by its mental images and the capacity to express and evoke emotion. Her article was the fourth in a series issuing from Lhasa (1996–1997) which sought to reconstruct the term '*snyan ngag*'.

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50 Gnam lha rgyal 1990: 127–36.

51 *ibid.*: 128. Tib. *snyan ngag ces pa ni shugs drag gi bsam pa'i tshor 'du dang phun sum tshogs pa'i 'char snang gis phyugs pa'i rtsom rig cig ste / de'i nus pa gtso bo ni tshe srog gis 'tsho ba'i khrod kyi tsa mngar skyur gsum gyi bro ba mtshon pa yin na / tshig sbyor snyan pa'i cha tsam gyis snyan ngag gi mtshan nyid du 'jog mi 'os /*

52 Dpal [lha] mo 1997: 97–101.

53 Having spent more than one decade in America (1943–1956) during the first part of her career, Zheng Min authored several essays on and translations of foreign literature. As of 1994, she was teaching courses on the history of British Literature and British and American literary works at Beijing Normal University. Yang Li 1994: 380.

54 Dpal [lha] mo 1997: 99.

Ultimately, this statement represents an eclipsed or narrower view of *snyan ngag*—one that does not allow it to be equated with 'belles-lettres' as a whole. Based on similar statements appearing with greater frequency in the mid-1990s, I believe this delimiting of *snyan ngag* results from the construction of *rtsom rig* as a discursive domain, one which essentially stripped *snyan ngag* of its wider associations. In the discursive transformation, *rtsom rig* as 'literature' has gained the *lhug spel ma* category of *snyan ngag*, and the concept of *snyan ngag* is more narrowly confined to poetry—whether it be in metric or free verse. *Snyan ngag* was thus subsumed within the purview of *rtsom rig*. Now when the broader understanding of *snyan ngag* is upheld by critics, their stance represents an alternative or even oppositional strategy, as I have discussed elsewhere (Hartley 2003). It is not so much that the definition of *snyan ngag* has changed completely, but that there are now two understandings: 1) the holdover view in which *snyan ngag* comprises all forms of literature, and 2) a second understanding that more closely approximates the western sense of 'poetry'.

Finally, the clearest testimony to the emergence of a *rtsom rig*-centred discourse—that is, a discourse that revolves around and thus serves to further construct the concept of '*rtsom rig*'—is the flourishing from only 1996 of Tibetan-medium books on 'Tibetan literary forms', 'the development and characteristics of Tibetan literature', and 'the new Tibetan literature'. For the most part, these textbooks are structured with a Western or contemporary literary perspective and written by undergraduate teachers of literature at the various nationality institutes.[55] These authors rely extensively on Western literary theorists, including Roland Barthes, M.H. Abrams, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren. Whereas classical and even contemporary works used to be evaluated through the prisms of *snyan ngag* in the 1980s, contemporary authors now apply foreign literary criteria to a wide spectrum of

[55] Examples include the following: Bsod nams dbang ldan and Bu bzhi [Bsam pa'i don grub], *Rtsom rig rnam bshad* (On Literature). Beijing: China's Tibetology Center, 1996; Lhag pa chos 'phel, *Rtsom rig gi rtsom lus rnam bzhag* (On literary forms), Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House, 1997; Bdud lha rgyal, *Bod kyi rtsom rig gsar ba'i brtsams chos bdams bkod dang de dag gi bshad pa* (An anthology of Tibetan new literary writings with commentary), Lanzhou: Gansu Nationalities Publishing House, 1998; Rin chen bkra shis, *Rtsom rig gsar rtsom gyi rnam bshad* (On the new literature), Xining: Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House, 1998; and Dpa' rtse and Lha rgyal tshe ring, *Bod kyi rtsom rig byung 'phel gyi lo rgyus dang khyad chos* (On the historical development and characteristics of Tibetan literature), Lanzhou: Gansu Nationalities Publishing House, 1999.

Tibetan literary works, including classical texts, modern poems and short stories, folk songs and even Old Tibetan texts from Dunhuang. The last phenomenon is especially intriguing, as one of the latest intellectual turns has been to showcase writings found at Dunhuang as 'authentic' indigenous Tibetan literature and to discount or even criticise the influence of Indic *kāvya.*

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STORIES AND HISTORY:
THE EMERGENCE OF HISTORICAL FICTION IN CONTEMPORARY TIBET

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Tibetan studies circles are gradually becoming aware of the existence of a Tibetan-medium literary scene inside China: novels and short stories, poetry (whether versified or free verse), poetic prose, and so on, are being published in great numbers, mostly in magazines, and more rarely in book format.[1] My own rough estimate is that at least one hundred Tibetan-medium magazines have appeared in Tibet (by which I mean all Tibetan-populated areas of China) in the last twenty years, with literary magazines amounting to about two-thirds of them. Some are short lived, others have lasted since their launching, the oldest being 23 years old and some being launched as late as last year. Some are officially supported, others are semi-private ventures. The two most widely read are *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* and *Sbrang char* which are issued respectively in Lhasa and Xining and have a circulation of about 7,000 copies each, which may seem modest, but which, given the rate of literacy in Tibet, represents an impressive readership.[2]

It is also now a well established fact that modern fiction written in Tibetan started in the early 1980s.[3] It can be estimated so far that at least

[1] Unfortunately, very few literary texts (poems or fiction writing) have been translated into a Western language so far.

[2] The literacy rate in Tibet is officially 50% according to a census ordered by Beijing in 2000—the average rate in China being over 95%. According to L. R. Hartley (Hartley 2003: 178–79), the average literacy rate of Tibetans in the PRC is "uncommonly low . . . (39% in 1995) . . . (Compare this figure with the PRC national average of 84%)". She quotes statistics from *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian* (China Population Statistics Yearbook), Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji Chubanshe (China Statistics Publishing House), 1997, pp. 90–93. This can partly explain the results of a 1999 survey showing that the TAR as well as the Qinghai Province have the lowest amount of book purchase per capita in the PRC : 0,9 and 2,5 books per year. Compare with the Shanghai Municipality (34,6), Shaanxi (14,2), Xinjiang (13,1) and Ningxia (8,8) (see Goodman 2002: 54).

[3] The case of *Ye shes sgrol ma dang mgar ba Stobs rgyal* (Ye shes sgrol ma and Stobs rgyal the blacksmith) by Rdo rje rgyal po (see Rdo rje rgyal po 1992), a medium-length novella which was written in the late 1950s in colloquial Tibetan, is an

2,500, not to say 3,000, short stories have been published since 1980.[4] Novels have also begun to appear, the first one in 1985, and the number of full-length published novels is at least sixteen, according to my count. A. Plaks once wrote that the appearance of the novel is a phenomenon that has to do with a radical change in intellectual history, and the Tibetan situation may prove him right:

> The novel form in some sense grows out of the increasing cultural complexity of the modern era, that it is, so to speak, a response to the sheer weight of history and culture at a certain stage in the development of civilization. . . . [It is a] manifestation of the need for some kind of a synthesis, a comprehensive reevaluation of the sum total of past cultural experience, in order to adapt that to the perception of emerging new directions.[5]

The main literary trend in fiction is realism, which has been favored since the beginning by the authorities who utilise the resources of literature to suit and serve the political agenda of the day. It follows that realism should ideally be socialist in content—which it has been, to a certain extent. More than twenty years after the launching of the 'opening door' policy (early 1980s) in Tibet, literature though is slowly acquiring its autonomy, and one frequently comes across short stories that no longer lapse into overt propaganda—anti-clericalism is not systematic any longer for instance—and do not serve an ideology. I refer to this literary trend as 'neutral' realism, although I do not want to overlook texts that undoubtedly convey veiled criticisms of the current situation.

In this essay, I would like to introduce a literary trend that has emerged recently—historical fiction[6] and more precisely, biofiction, or biographical fiction. In a short period of eighteen months (between August 1998 and December 1999), no less than three full-length historical novels or biofictions have been published in Tibetan and in Tibet. One deals with Thon mi Sambhota (7th century), the second with Khri Gnam lde dbon btsan po, King of Tsong kha (11th century) and the third, with Sa skya Pandita (13th century).

exception as far as I know. This work still awaits study by specialists.

4 My own estimate.

5 Plaks 1980 : 173.

6 A definition of historical novel is provided by Ma 1975 : 278 : "A fictional work which embodies, in an artistic blending of actuality and imagination, a core of historically factual material, with allowance for inventiveness in both figures and events combined with respect for established facts".

Does this trend follow a new orientation prompted and decided upon by propaganda bureaus, which traditionally oversee art and literature circles in China? Indeed, the politico-cultural speeches that are regularly published in important literary magazines and daily papers provide an interesting vantage point from which to assess the political and artistic mood in Tibet. In fact, the speeches I have been able to examine so far make scant reference to history, historical events and characters, and seem to focus more on the present. That is, modern Tibetan fiction should theoretically emulate such topics as the building up of a Socialist Tibet, the praise of scientific education, and the rejection of separatism. In fact, however, published fiction hardly ever complies with such policies, to the reader's and researcher's relief.

In the transcription of a speech given in 2001 for the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the Federation of Arts and Literature in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), an anonymous article stressed:

> So as to spread and increase artistic manifestations in TAR, one must particularly turn towards the progressive advanced cultures [i.e., Chinese culture]. For art to go ahead in the TAR, one must first and at all cost cherish the unity of the motherland, fight nationalities splittism, and show in their reality and without fail the history, characters and events related to the unification of the motherland, the harmony between nationalities, and the building of a socialist TAR, and this, through representative characters and facts.[7]

Historical events and characters, therefore, may be referred to in fiction writing as long as they support the unity of the motherland, a general theme frequently evident in Chinese fiction, which a critic has coined the 'national security novel'.[8] This seems to be the very reason why the play *Po ta la'i gsang gtam* (*Potala's Secret Story*) was banned at the end of 1996: its description (neutral, if not laudatory) of Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705), the acting 'prime minister' during the last part of the Fifth Dalai Lama's reign and after, infuriated the TAR

[7] Anon. 2001: 103.

[8] Ma 1975: 282–83. This trend may have started with or been reinforced by the Japanese occupation of China, as in 1935–36: the "Communist Party of China raised the demand for a National Defence Government where both the Kuo-min-tang and Communists would be represented. Immediately following this demand of the Communist Party the leftists writers proclaimed the slogan of National Defence Literature. The link between political expediency and literature was strongly forged during this period" (Tagore 1973: 28; see also the chapter on National Defence Literature pp. 167–89).

Party Secretary Chen Kuiyuan (1992–2000), who branded Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho a 'separatist chieftain', in a famous speech delivered on 11 July 1997 at the onset of a nation-wide literary campaign (launched in China in May that year) aimed at making 'Socialist art with Chinese characteristics' prosper. He resented that "political tendencies and ideological contents of literary and artistic works are not controlled strictly and accurately" and recalled that "the guiding principle for our literary and art work has been that literature and art serve the workers, the peasants, and soldiers as well as the working people".[9] It is not known whether this strong stance was followed by any further banning of historical figures.

One politico-historical event that seems to have inspired writers past and present is the 1904 Younghusband expedition. I have identified three different works dealing with this event (although there may certainly be many more). In 1995, *Shing 'brug g.yul 'gyed* (The Battle of the Wood-Dragon Year), a short black and white comic strip, was published in Lhasa. It focuses mainly on the battles between the British and the Tibetan troops and ends with the suicide of the Tibetan soldiers trapped in the local fort, the Rgyal rtse rdzong rtse.[10] In 1998, Reb gong Rdo rje mkhar (born in 1958 in Reb gong, Qinghai, and now a vice-president of the Translation Bureau of the Nationalities of China), published a long novel (502 pages) entitled *Rkyal ba'i 'jig rten du nyul* [myul] *ba'i gtam rgyud* (A Story Exploring the World in a Leather Bag), in which a young man called 'Gangs phrug' (Child of the Snow) penetrates into a magic leather bag which leads him to several historical periods and geographical spots of Tibet: at one point he meets with the 6th Dalai Lama, Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho (1683–1706?), while at another he lives in Srong btsan sgam po's time (first half of the 7th century). The third chapter, *G.yul 'thab pa'i ki sgra* (The Call for Battle), is set during the 1904 invasion.[11]

[9] SWB FE/2989 G/11. This speech was published on 16 July 1997 in the Tibet Daily, pp. 1–4. English translation to be found in Summary of World Broadcast (BBC) 1997 n°FE/2989 G/9–15. I thank T. Shakya who kindly provided me with this document.

[10] Tshe ring don grub 1995.

[11] Reb gong Rdo rje mkhar 1998. Interestingly enough, what seems to be the first novel written by a Tibetan, *Idols on the Path*, also begins with a dramatic evocation of the encounter between Tibetans and the British Army in 1904. The French translation of this novel was published in 1975 and bore the title *Tibet, l'an du dragon* (see Pemba 1975: 12–68). According to the French version, its author, Tsewang Pemba, was born in Rgyal rtse in 1932 and went to London in 1949 to study medicine there.

I turn now to a third text, which narrates the same events.[12] Written to officially celebrate the 90th anniversary of the invasion of Dbus gtsang by the British troops, its thirty pages begin with a brief survey of the 'Great Game' which shook Central Asia at the turn of the 20th century. The story provides an account of the Anglo-Tibetan conflict, from the beginning of the battle until the flight of the 13th Dalai lama after Rgyal rtse fell to the British. The main character is an ordinary man, called Dgra 'dul, who vividly recalls the one who was to become Tsha rong Zla bzang Dgra 'dul (1888–1959), a close associate to the 13th Dalai Lama and head of the Tibetan Army between 1913 and 1924. The 13th Dalai Lama and the 9th Panchen Lama also figure in the plot, as well as the then amban Youtai, about whom P. Fleming wrote that "he might as well have been in Liverpool for all the influence he was exerting on Tibetan policy", an attitude that is well rendered in the story.[13] Two Tibetan generals (*mda' dpon*) (Lha lding sras and Bkras gling)[14] and two ministers (*bka' blon chen po* Bsod nams dbang grags, and *bka' blon* Dbang 'dus) feature in the narrative, as well as two characters I suspect are fictional and added for the sake of livening up the narration: Dgra 'dul's fiancée Tshe dbyangs, who agrees to postpone their wedding for the sake of the motherland, and the amban's Tibetan servant, Tshe lo. After reading this short story, one is left with the impression that even if it does promote patriotism and love for one's fatherland (*mes rgyal*), since the descriptions of crimes carried out by the British soldiers (murders, rapes and torture) do enhance anti-British feelings, one may wonder which fatherland the reader is meant to understand. The final scene substantiates this feeling. Riding his horse, the 13th Dalai lama flees from Lhasa; he turns around, sets his eyes one last time upon the Potala and declares, with a lump in his throat and tears in his eyes: "Dear country (*pha yul*), my subjects, I had to aban-

[12] Note that my interpretation of this short story only reflects my opinion and should not suggest that of the author (whom I have never met). For this reason I chose to withhold the author's name as well as the book's publication details.

[13] Fleming 1961: 162. A Mongolian, he held his position as an amban from 1902 to 1906. He "wrote at least six works including a travelogue titled *Shi [sic] Zang riji*, a tome of diplomatic correspondence between Tibet and India, Zang-Yin laiwang zhaozui, and other works" (Kolmaś 1994: 460). He died in 1910.

[14] According to L. Petech, the first one "arrived at P'ag-ri at the end of 1903, stayed at Tuna during the winter and was killed fighting at Guru on 31st March, 1904" (Petech 1973: 198). No mention of the second is to be found in Petech's work but the author of a work which will be studied later in this article bears the name Bkras gling and hails from an aristocratic family from Rgyal rtse.

don everything because of previously accumulated karma (*las dbang*). You have experienced suffering. I have no courage [or power]".[15] It is my feeling that the reader will be tempted to establish a parallel between this scene and another one which will happen fifty-five years later.

If the Tibetan-medium literary scene were to adhere strictly to the guidelines imposed by propaganda bureaus, then we should not expect to find much historical fiction that is devoid of orthodox political content. Yet, as early as 1983 and increasingly ever since, fictional writing with a 'neutral' historical content has begun to appear. We do not refer here to state-approved narratives located in a vague past which are meant to describe the horror and cruelty of the feudal 'old society' (*spyi tshogs rnying pa*), as pre-1950 Tibet is indiscriminately referred to. This literary-cum-political line was encouraged as early as 1980, particularly in writing classes that were held in the early 1980s to train new writers. We will not deal either with narratives concerning the 'peaceful liberation' nor with the Cultural Revolution, which are indeed highly meaningful historical moments but whose evocation was and still is officially supported by the authorities. Furthermore, these events may be too recent and sensitive to provide enough ground for a full historical analysis. Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), which is considered the first historical novel in European literature, bore as a subtitle, *'Tis Sixty Years Since*, setting a standard sixty-year span which some specialists agree upon as being the minimum distance required to write historical fiction.[16] If we concentrate on fictional narratives that deal with pre-1950 Tibet, two chronologically homogenous periods appear: on the one hand, texts which narrate events that took place in the first half of the 20th century, and on the other hand, texts that deal with a much more distant past, from the 7th through 13th centuries.[17]

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[15] " *Pha yul lags /'Bangs mi rnam pa / Sngon bsags kyi las dbang zhig gis yod tshad dgra lag tu bskyur dgos byung / Khyod tshos dka' las myangs song / Nga la nus pa mi 'dug*".

[16] "About the year 1805, I threw together about one-third of the first volume of Waverley. It was advertised to be published by the late Mr. John Ballantyne, bookseller in Edinburgh, under the name of "Waverley, or 'Tis Fifty Years Since",—a title afterwards altered to " 'Tis Sixty Years since", that the actual date of publication might be made to correspond with the period in which the scene was laid . . ." (Scott 1994: 7).

[17] I am aware that to a Tibetan readership, 'historical fiction' (*lo rgyus sgrung gtam* or *lo rgyus sgrung rtsom*) is restricted to a fictional narrative of events located in a very distant past, however vague that may sound. I wish to thank Lhag pa chos 'phel (Tibet University, Lhasa) and Ljang bu (Paris and Lhasa) for an interesting discussion we had

The first group is made up of texts which can be divided in turn into two geographically centred groups: Dbus gtsang and A mdo. With regard to Dbus gtsang, one can quote such titles as *Gtsug g.yu* (*The Head Turquoise*) by Dpal 'byor,[18] *Bkras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* (*The Secret Tale of the Bkras zur House*) by Bkras gling Dbang rdor,[19] and *Drel pa'i mi tshe* (*Life of a Muleteer*) by Lhag pa don grub[20] (as well as the previously mentioned text based on the Younghusband expedition). All are novels, and deal either marginally or mainly with the emergence of a bourgeois class, the development of business with India, and the education of aristocratic children in Christian schools in

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on the subject in Oxford in September 2003, following the presentation of this paper. But in a series dedicated to literary terminology that was published in *Sbrang char* magazine recently, one could read the following definition for *lo rgyus sgrung gtam*: "Historical fiction is a type of fiction which is written through detailed descriptions of historical characters and events. As it represents and conjures up the essence of life and historical developments that actually happened, readers can become familiar and gain certainty about history, and at the same time it has the definite power to open their minds. Generally speaking, this kind of fiction relies on actual historical events, but it may also resort to invention, synthesis, one's fancy and [whatever is] appropriate [ran pa]. But the main characters and events carefully described in this kind of work must have a historical origin, and it is not proper to resort to groundless invention or mere fancy" (Rdo rje 2002: 142–43). It has been argued by a French specialist of historical fiction that "a historical novel is any novelistic narrative located in a past that requires that the author resort to historiography" (Peyronie 2000: 280). While this may seem reasonable enough, one can temper this assertion by quoting here W. Scott himself, regarding how he composed *Waverley*: he resorted to his own knowledge of the Scottish Highlands, his interest in local folklore, as well as conversations with "many of the old warriors of 1745, who were, like most veterans, easily induced to fight their battles over again, for the benefit of a willing listener like myself. It naturally occurred to me that the ancient traditions and high spirit of a people who, living in a civilized age and country, retained so strong a tincture of manners belonging to an early period of society, must afford a subject favourable for romance, if it should not prove a curious tale marred in the telling" (Scott 1994: 6–7). Obviously, the founder of the genre of the historical novel himself did not make use of historiographical material, which is why I stick to my opinion that the three novels mentioned in this work as pertaining to early 20th century narratives can be classified as historical fiction, since they conjure up and document a vanished world through personal experience and oral folk narratives related to that time. Moreover, it is my opinion that these three novels, because their authors resorted to personal memories and second-hand accounts, are able to convey the atmosphere of the eras they describe in a more convincing way than the other biofictions mentioned in this article.

[18] Dpal 'byor 1985.

[19] Bkras gling Dbang rdor 1997. The author was educated in a missionary school in India between 1946 and 1953 and translated his own novel into English; the translation was subsequently published in Beijing (see Tailing 1998). The novel was then translated into German, following the English version.

[20] Lhag pa don grub 1997.

the Indian Himalayas. Coincidentally, it is a period in which 'modern' Tibetan nationalism emerged. All of them are written by senior Tibetans who experienced the ancient way of life they described (Dpal 'byor and Bkras gling Dbang rdor belong to the aristocracy; Lhag pa don grub was born near the Tibet-India border, in Phag ri, and was a trader between India and Tibet) and who seem to want to share their knowledge of a society gone forever. These novels definitely share a flavor of 'remembrance of things past'. *Gtsug g.yu* does not give any temporal clues, apart from one veiled reference to an unspecified Dalai Lama. Still, the atmosphere, the trans-Himalayan trade, and the discovery of Indian goods, among other features that pervade the whole story, unmistakably recall the period that followed 1904. This is confirmed by T. Shakya who wrote that "though propagandistic, the book was widely read and liked by Tibetans for its use of language and its portrayal of old ways of life".[21] *Bkras zur tshang* is more explicit, since it gives a date for the action (1939), the year in which little Pad ma is sent to a Catholic school in Darjeeling (Loretto School). The Regent and the Bka' shag appear later in the narrative, when their conservative stance forbids the enterprising Bkras zur family to set up a wool and leather factory, as well as a hydroelectric power station and a road to carry goods. The author does not fail to criticize their conservative attitude to material progress.

The very interesting novel, *Drel pa'i mi tshe*, may be the work in which 'real' history looms most strikingly, since it refers throughout the book to trading counters open by the wealthy Spom mda' tshang family in Lhasa and Kalimpong (Darjeeling), and shows an encounter between the muleteer, his master and Babu Tharchin, the founder of the Kalimpong-based Tibetan journal, *Gsar 'gyur me long*.[22] Reference is made to the publishing activities of Babu Tharchin, as the master buys some books published by the Mirror Press (which Babu Tharchin launched in the 1920s). Also, at the beginning of the narrative, Zla phun, the muleteer, is shown setting his eyes on the Potala for the first time: at that very moment, he harbors a feeling of faith and mixed feelings of joy and sadness.[23] It could be an indication that the scene takes

[21] Shakya 2000: 33.

[22] Lhag pa don grub 1997: 255. Interestingly, the muleteer's master happens to be a benevolent and good-hearted person, which reinforces the idea that such new narratives shift away from the class-struggle ridden cliché portrayals of social relations to be found in earlier (1980s) Tibetan fiction.

[23] Lhag pa don grub 1997: 26.

place between 1933 and 1939, after the 13th Dalai lama's death and before the arrival of his reincarnation in Lhasa.

As for A mdo, the novels that make a reference to 20th-century history include: *Nem mdangs spang ljongs kyi rgan po* (The Old Man from the Nem mdangs Meadow) by Rdo rje rin chen ;[24] *Sdug bsngal gyi mig chu* (Tears of Suffering); and *Rnam shes kyi dgod sgra* (The Laughing Consciousness) both by Reb gong Rdo rje mkhar.[25] They deal with the struggles and alliances between the Muslim and Amdo Tibetan communities in the first half of the 20th century, not to mention the numerous other short stories in which more or less violent encounters between Tibetans and Muslims in that period either feature in the background or are hinted at. Interestingly enough, one of the first illustrated Tibetan and Chinese books (with 149 illustrations), titled *Gser dngul thang* and published by the Nationalities Press (Mi rigs dpe skrun khang) in Beijing in July 1954, dealt with the same topic, namely, the fighting between A mdo Tibetans from Thar shul in Gser thang and Dngul thang in A rig, and Muslims before the 'Peaceful Liberation'.[26]

But let us now turn to the core of our concern: in the middle of 1998, the first self-declared historical fiction (*lo rgyus sgrung gtam*, more precisely, biofiction) was published by the Qinghai Nationalities Press (Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang). The author, Tshe brtan rdo rje, was head of the Qinghai edition of *Rtser bsnyegs* magazine, an organ of the Chinese Communist Party. The novel is entitled *Tsong kha'i rgyal bo* (The King of Tsong kha) and deals with the life and times of the King of Tsong kha, Khri Gnam lde dbon btsan po, the ruler who supposedly hailed from a branch of the Yar lung royal family which emigrated to Western Tibet after the collapse of the Tibetan empire.[27] The second novel is *Gangs can Bod yul du springs pa'i 'phrin yig* (The Letter Sent to Tibet, the Land of Snows), a fictional biography of Sa skya Pandita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan by 'Brong bu Rdo rje rin chen, a middle-aged author who has already published a fair amount of

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[24] Rdo rje rin chen 1982.

[25] Reb gong Rdo rje mkhar 1982 and Reb gong Rdo rje mkhar 1996. Rdo rje rin chen 1982 and Reb gong Rdo rje mkhar 1982 have been enlisted here after reading A. Moon's brief summary of these short stories (Moon 1991: 15). I was not able to get hold of them in time for the redaction of the present article.

[26] Mentioned in Schubert 1958: 24. The previous year, a movie also called *Gser dngul thang* had been made by a Chinese director.

[27] Tshe brtan rdo rje 1998.

poems and short stories.[28] Lastly, an author called Rang sgra, who is rather famous among Tibetan literary circles, published *Thon mi Sambhota* in December 1999.[29]

None of these three authors claims to have composed scientific history: the full titles of *Thon mi Sambhota* and *Tsong kha'i rgyal po* warn the reader of the nature of the text by including such terms as *sgrung gtam* (fiction), *zlos gar* (illusory play), or *sgyu ma* (illusion).[30] As for 'Brong bu Rdo rje rin chen's Sa Pan biography, the author's foreword states that:

> Actually, history yields no testament, but only scarce fragments. So as to complete such historical fragments, we are left with no choice but to take refuge in art. It is an unavoidable necessity and one of life's characteristics. Needless to say that historians will greatly apprehend reading history written from an artistic point of view. Alas! *A Letter Sent to Tibet, the Land of Snows* is in fact a historical fiction [*lo rgyus sgrung rtsom*] which illustrates particular moments of the biography of the great Sa skya Pandita, mighty among the wise men of Tibet.[31]

So, if the historical facts and dates given in those three novels are subject to controversy and discussion (which they are indeed, as H. Stoddard's on Tsong kha kingdom shows), what do the authors aim at, and what do their readers expect? [32]

First of all, two decades have passed since the beginning of Tibetan-medium modern fiction writing in Tibet. Thus it is to be expected that authors are eagerly exploring new literary paths: after socialist realism, plain realism, magical realism and heroic fantasy, historical fiction appears as yet another literary field to be explored. What are the possible sources for such an innovation? On the Tibetan side, this kind of modern biofiction recalls *phyi'i rnam thar*, or exoteric biography, for two reasons: first because its main focus concerns external, mundane events, and second, because these three texts tend to be hagiographies rather than neutral assessment of the achievements of great men.[33] In a

[28] 'Brong bu Rdo rje rin chen 1999.

[29] Rang sgra 1999.

[30] It can be noted that adding a long title as a subtitle to a contemporary fictional work is not a common feature. In our case, it can be interpreted either as a pastiche of traditional works or as a hint to the historical nature of the subjects discussed.

[31] 'Brong bu Rdo rje rin chen 1999: 1.

[32] According to Stoddard, this ruler hailed from the Lha rtse branch of the Yar lung family and not from Gu ge, as most people claim. See Stoddard 2004.

[33] This is a characteristic of the genre: biographies are often flawed by a 'danger-

way then, modern biofictions may be seen as recycled, modern and secularised *phyi'i rnam thar*. Also, the trend of biofiction and historical biofiction has been favored by eminent Tibetans who write in Chinese: the novelist and Ge sar specialist 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho is the author of a biofiction of the 13th Dalai lama,[34] and another author called Rdo rje tshe brtan wrote a biofiction of the 6th Dalai lama which was awarded numerous literary prizes.[35] Above all, one must recall the influence of Don grub dbang 'bum, vice-rector of Beijing's Central Institute for Nationalities (*Krung dbyang mi rigs slob grwa chen mo*; Ch.: *Minzu Xueyuan*), who resorted to the genre of biofiction to present parts of the history of the Spu rgyal empire.[36] His book entitled *Tubo shi yanyi* (*A Historical Fiction of Imperial Tibet*) is a fictional rendering of events and characters of Tibetan imperial history.[37] Some parts were translated into Tibetan in 1990 and 1991 under the general title of *Btsan po rim byon gyi rtogs brjod rab gsal me long* (Chronological *Avadāna* of the *btsan po*s—A Very Clear Mirror). These deal respectively with Gnya' khri btsan po,[38] Lo ngam the groom,[39] Bya khri (one of the three sons of Gri gum btsan po), also known as Spu lde gung rgyal,[40] and the conquest of the Sum pa people by Srong btsan sgam po.[41] Another text by the same author deals with Srong btsan sgam po.[42] Historical fiction and biofiction have certainly been inspired by the long tradition of his-

-ous enthusiasm', as a literary critic lamented recently concerning a recent biofictional drama about William Blake (Reitz 1999: 60).

34 Jiangbian Jiacuo 1985. This work is mentioned in Sainbayar 1998: 10. It was republished in 2002 (interview with the author, Oxford, September 2003) but I have no details concerning this new edition.

35 See Duojie Caidan 1992. The inner cover of *Sbrang char* 1991/2 is dedicated to this author. The Tibetan title of his Chinese-medium novel is *Rgyal dbang drug pa yul byol du phebs pa* (The 6th Dalai Lama's Errand).

36 A. Grünfelder considers Don grub dbang 'bum (born in 1955) as belonging to the older generation of Chinese-language Tibetan writers, like Ye shes bstan 'dzin for instance, for whom literature is seen as a political tool to flatter the authorities, as opposed to the younger generation of writers including Tashi Dawa, Alai, Sebo and others (Grünfelder 1998: 337–38). Things may not be so simple.

37 Yanyi "means 'elaboration', but is not invariably confined to historical fiction" (Ma 1975: 278, n. 4).

38 Don grub dbang 'bum 1990a. This reference is indicated in the 1981–1991 catalogue of titles published in *Sbrang char* magazine (Anon. 1991: 44), but I was unable to locate it in the corresponding *Sbrang char* issue.

39 Don grub dbang 'bum 1990b.

40 Don grub dbang 'bum 1990c.

41 Don grub dbang 'bum 1991a.

42 Don grub dbang 'bum 1991b.

torical fiction (Ch. *jianshi*—historical narrative)[43] which is paramount in Chinese literature,[44] to the extent that A. Plaks once suggested that the lack of epic literature in China could be explained by the extensive historiographical narratives.[45] Recently, such a respectable and admired personality as Laozi has become the main character of a biofiction written by Yang Shu'an.[46] Popular historical novels and biofictions are still widely published in China and prove to be a very popular genre. In brief, to quote a Chinese commentator, "the historical novel, while enjoying enormous popularity across the social strata, is one of the most favoured genres in the countryside and finds a large number of fans among the intelligentsia".[47] One should not forget either to assess the impact of television which shapes the world view and references of many Tibetans, as with almost everybody: over the last two decades, such movies as *Songcenganbu* (Srong btsan sgam po), *Bu da la gong mishi* (*Po ta la gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*, Potala's Secret Story),[48] *Pan chen shar phyogs su bskyod pa* (The Panchen Lama Goes East), or *Rgya bza' Bal bza'* (The Nepalese Princess and the Chinese Princess) have been made and shown on Tibetan television, not to mention the numerous films that deal with Chinese historical events.

Second, such fictions have an educational value, as is underlined in the prefaces and postscripts of the works presented here. Their authors hope that the readers, who are mainly young persons, often familiar with TV and film format, will find in such biofictions a pleasant and new means to discover their own history. It is not that their history is unavailable to them, but the young Tibetan readership may have diffi-

[43] Postel 2000: 316.

[44] "Historical writing, oriented towards the function of transmission, occupies the predominant position within the range of Chinese narrative possibilities, so that it is fiction that becomes the subset and historiography the central model of narration" (Plaks 1977: 314). In another article, Plaks states that the central role of historiography "must be stressed not only because a large portion of the corpus of Ming-Ch'ing fiction can be called 'historical fiction' either in terms of its central figures or its documentary sources, but also because it continues to draw upon 'official' historiography for a variety of formal and structural devices, as well as for its overall sense of the broader context and significance of human events" (Plaks 1980: 165).

[45] Plaks 1977: 314.

[46] Cf. the advertisement on the back cover of the magazine *Littérature chinoise*, trimestre 2 1998.

[47] Guo 1998: 170.

[48] It is this very movie that inspired the banned eponymous drama mentioned above. The film itself had been banned in the early 1990s, on which see R. Barnett's contribution to the IATS X proceedings.

culty in reading historical documents written in an archaic Tibetan, or else in flowery *snyan ngag* style, replete with magical fantasy, wrapped up in post-1950 Marxist jargon or tinged with Han-chauvinist prejudice. The three biofiction novels dealt here with are written in a contemporary, flowing, sober Tibetan, with some current A mdo dialectal expressions which sound strange, to say the least, in the mouth of Thon mi Sambhota or Sa skya Pandita, but which make the reading pleasant and relatively easy. They also feature a characteristic use of realistic fictional devices, including flashbacks, lively dialogues, descriptions of scenery and above all, descriptions of the inner mental processes of the characters by the all-knowing writer. Paradoxically, such fictional devices guarantee a true-to-life atmosphere which make such books good basic educational tools. Another educational indicator, beyond mere scholarship, is of course self-emulation: in this, these biofictions can be considered a secular version of Buddhist hagiographies, similar to medieval acta that appeared in Europe in the 13th century.

Third, and possibly most important, such historical writings are closely linked to a search for identity. It is no coincidence that the Scottish Sir Walter Scott's narratives questioned the nature of Scottish identity within the British kingdom (in his preface to the third edition of Waverley, he writes that his novel is a "slight attempt at a sketch of ancient Scottish manners".[49] Moreover, he stated expressly that by writing Waverley, he aimed at

> introduc[ing] her [Scotland's] natives to those of the sister kingdom [Britain], in a more favourable light than they had been placed hitherto; and tend[ing] to produce sympathy for their virtues and indulgence for their foibles.[50]

In China, historical fiction is popular today because it arouses and enhances the feeling of patriotism, shared by the overwhelming majority of Han citizens, which is especially palpable since the early 1990s after the authorities condemned Chinese criticism of China as 'cultural' or 'national nihilism'. A concern for one's own history and identity is also shared today by Uyghur writers. Abdurehim Ötkür (1920s–1995) published in the 1980s and 1990s three volumes of historical fiction that tackle the history of Xinjiang from 1907 to 1945.[51] In 19th-centu-

49 Scott 1994: 49.
50 Scott 1994: 8.

ry Bengal, local novelists undertook to contest the British vision of Indian history by publishing historical novels modeled after Sir Walter Scott's works: "many novels of that period show the revenge of Indians on their successive invaders: first Muslims, then British".[52] It is the same with Tibetan heroes of the past for a contemporary Tibetan audience. This is not to say that such books are nationalistic in the sense feared by Chinese authorities, with an separatist implication. The author of the biofiction of Sa skya Pandita claims to be an advocate of *mes rgyal gcig gyur*, or unity of nationalities within China.[53] The new genre of biofiction must be considered as a new literary and intellectual dimension of the search for Tibet's past and identity initiated in the last century by Dge 'dun chos 'phel (1903–1951) and Don grub rgyal (1953–1985) in their historical research. It serves in the building of a collective identity and a collective awareness on which Tibetan identity is based. A Chinese commentator wrote a few years ago about the fever of historically-tinged artistic production, arguing that:

> the dramatic increase in recent years in the number of historical novels published and of historical dramas produced in the theatre, the cinema and on television is without doubt a result of the 'national essence heat'.[54]

Such is the case for almost all ethnic groups who feel that their specific features are misunderstood, jeopardised or ignored, whether because of globalisation or internal pressure. Historical narratives examined in this article can be seen in this light as a literary tool by which a marginalised community manages to "write back to the centre": Thon mi Sambhota is credited with the invention of the Tibetan alphabet, a central symbol of national identity which played a crucial role in the development of the Tibetan empire; Sa Pan was, at least according to 'Brong

[51] Iz (*Traces*, 1985, Xinjiang Renmin Chubanshe) covering the period 1907–1913, *Oyghanghan Zemin* I and II (*The Awakening Land* I & II, 1987 and 1994, Xinjiang Renmin Chubanshe), for the period 1913–1945. His untimely death from cancer in 1995 prevented him from completing a fourth volume that was to cover the period 1945–1949. His work was not altogether approved of by the cultural authorities when he was alive: "The Chinese government clamped down on [his] work in 1992 because he became too popular and because it viewed the political statements made in his books as too obvious" (Rudelson 1997: 164). Excerpts from the first part of this trilogy were translated into Turkish and published in a Turkish magazine (Mackeras 1995: 192).

[52] Bhattacharya 2001: 140.

[53] Interview with the author, Gcan tsha, Qinghai, July 2002.

[54] Guo 1998: 179.

bu Rdo rje rin chen, the first Tibetan ever to be credited with the honorific Sanskrit title of *paṇḍita*, which is the reason why the author chose him as the main character of his novel.[55] The King of Tsong kha tells of the rise (but interestingly, not of the fall) of a Tibetan kingdom that emerged from the ashes of the Tibetan empire of Spu rgyal and competed with the neighbouring Xixia, Khitan, Chinese and Uighurs. Twenty years ago, Luciano Petech had described this king as "the greatest figure in medieval history of Amdo"[56] and according to Rolf A. Stein, the formidable history of the dynasty of Tsong kha rulers may well have "contributed to the formation of a local legendary cycle",[57] traces of which may be seen in the Gesar epic. Each of those three texts narrates a story of culture, glory and success, located in a distant past.

Michael Aris once remarked on the polysemy of the Tibetan word *dran pa* which means memory as well as awareness.[58] It may give us a clue to understanding why young Tibetan authors who are not historians by profession strive to introduce historical characters in their fictional writings. Can this interest in the past be considered an end in itself? Are the authors of these biofictions some "antiquarian[s] enjoying the nostalgic escapism into a personal, idealized past" ?[59] This could perhaps be the case, but it would be too narrow a perspective to maintain. The emergence of historical biofiction in today's Tibet reflects two trends: an increasing interest in fiction writing, at least within literary circles (the biofiction of Sa skya Pandita was almost sold out three years after its publication), and a new historical consciousness spurred by the shock precipitated by the 1950s Chinese takeover of Tibet.[60] Tibet, after having been driven by religion for centuries, then by Marxism and Han nationalism for fifty years, strives toward a secular or lay quest for Tibetan national identity. Paraphrasing Eva Neumaier's reflections on a type of historical narratives (*chab brjod*) used in Zanskar to assess Zanskari self awareness in the face of

[55] Interview with the author, Gcan tsha (Qinghai), July 2002. But according to Kapstein 2000: 104, Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po (11th century) was called a *pandita*, which would invalidate 'Brong bu Rdo rje rin chen's statement.

[56] Petech 1983: 177.

[57] Stein 1981: 12.

[58] Aris 1997: 9.

[59] Middeke 1999: 18.

[60] In *The Historical Novel*, which is still considered the key essay on the subject almost fifty years after its first publication (1956), G. Lukacs writes that what triggered the historical novel genre in Europe is "the French Revolution, the revolutionary wars,

traditional Lhasa political centrality, we can view such biofictions as "a narrative strategy to assign [the Tibetans] a place of centrality within their marginality, whereby creating a cultural identity that [permits] them to maintain a 'national' and cultural self-esteem ".[61] As a conclusion, we can add to Aris's statement that *dran pa* also means 'to miss', which also fits our purpose here since what is expressed in these biofictions is certainly, among other feelings, a longing for Tibetan power and agency when it comes to writing one's own people's history.

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and the rise and fall of Napoleon which for the first time turned history into an event experienced by the masses" (Lukacs 2000: 21; my translation from the French version). G. Lukacs' impressive analysis sheds invaluable light on historical fiction as a new genre but its focus on European countries and cultures makes it difficult to apply it wholly to Tibetan literature and civilization, whose history and characteristics have little to do with its European counterparts. Still, one can surmise that the 'Peaceful Liberation', the exile of the Dalai lama and, finally, the Cultural Revolution, may have contributed to the rise of a new sense of history among the Tibetan masses.

[61] Neumaier 2002: 328.

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CONTEMPORARY TIBETAN LITERATURE FROM SHANGRI-LA: LITERARY LIFE AND ACTIVITIES IN THE YUNNAN TIBETAN REGION (1950–2002)[1]

LARA MACONI (INALCO - PARIS)

In the late 1990s, Robert Barnett (2001) was one of the first Western observers-cum-academics in Sino-Tibetan studies to point out similarities between Western and Chinese representations of *Mythos Tibet*[2] and between Western and Chinese political strategies implied in those representations. The construction of the spiritual land of peace and perfection of Shangri-La is one of those.[3] Concerning the strategic invention of Shangri-La in China, Barnett observed that, in the late 1990s, there was fierce competition among officials in certain areas of China to claim the title of being the original Shangri-La (2001: 272). He added in a footnote: "The current front-runners in this competition are the leaders of Dechen Tibet Autonomous Prefecture [Diqing zangzu zizhizhou 迪庆藏族自治州] in Yunnan, where the claim is connected to tourism development and the construction of a new airport" (2001: 306). Barnett's early observations have been confirmed by the recent evolution of the

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[1] This paper is based on fieldwork carried out in the Yunnan Tibetan region in September and October 2002. My fieldwork was sponsored by the Paris-based Ecole d'Extrême Orient and by the 'ESA 8047' CNRS Team of Tibetology and Himalayan Studies to, which I express my gratitude.

[2] Mythos Tibet, an International Symposium held in Bonn, Germany, in May 1996, was organised by Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther in collaboration with the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany. The papers presented in that Symposium are collected in Dodin and Heinz 2001.

[3] For a complete list of Western pieces of literature on the myth of Tibet and Shangri-La, see Lopez 1998: 240, note 23. For the first Western language reports commenting on the construction of Shangri-La in China, see Xinhua 1997, and Korski 1997.

following political and economic events in Yunnan. According to official Chinese sources, on the 14th of September, 1997, during the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the creation of Yunnan Bde chen Tibet Autonomous Prefecture (TAP), Dai Guanglu 戴光禄 (the vice-governor of Yunnan province) announced on all China media that after one year of intensive research and fieldwork, the Yunnan Scientific Team for the Research of Shangri-La had been able to prove definitively that Shangri-La was originally located in Yunnan Bde chen TAP.[4] Zhongdian—the capital of Bde chen TAP—was subsequently officially renamed Shangri-La (Ch. Xianggelila 香格里拉; Tib. Sham bha la).[5] The politico-economic launching of Yunnan Shangri-La was made concretely effective in September 2001, after the implementation of an important tourist promotion campaign of the Bde chen region. This campaign consisted of massive media coverage, significant efforts in the implementation of communication facilities and tourist equipment, changes in the brand names of local products, changes in the heading of official documents and in the inscriptions of traffic signs all over the region, and so on.[6] Shangri-La county is now an easy 45-minute flight from Kunming's international airport, and the tourists are pouring in.[7]

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[4] Many articles in Chinese media have dealt with Shangri-La research activities. See for example, Liu 1997, Yang 1999, and Wang 2001(a).

[5] The concomitant adoption of the Chinese toponym of Xianggelila (Shangri-La) and the Tibetan toponym of Sham bha la to say one and the same place, that is the capital of Bde chen TAP, create multi-evocative correspondences among the fictional and recently constructed world of Shangri-La, the Tibetan traditional notion of Sham bha la, and *mahāsukha* (Tib. *bde ba chen po*), the 'great joy' in Tibetan tantric literature.

[6] One cannot but note that the Chinese politics of promoting the spiritual land of Shangri-La in Bde chen TAP is very different from the earlier Chinese official propagandistic rhetoric which has profusely described Tibet as the obscure and feudal land of poverty and backwardness. However, the promotion of the Yunnan Tibetan region has not prevented the traditional PCC denigrating rhetoric on 'old Tibet' from appearing in the Chinese media in recent years. These two kinds of discourse on Tibet (promotion and denigration) exist together in the Chinese press (see, for example, Jin 1991 and Huang 1999). A few recent Chinese articles have been reticent in welcoming the Shangri-La 'discovery' in Bde chen TAP in 1997. Some critical voices cried out that 'old Tibet' (including Bde chen TAP) could not be 'Shangri-La', and denounced a contradiction in the official Chinese discourse. Wang Xiaosong (Wang 2001: 27), trying to answer to those critics, writes that 'old Tibet' means the feudal political system of the old central Tibetan government which

The implementation of the new Chinese tourist policy of economic development in the newly created Shangri-La and its environs has also meant the adoption of new literary and editorial strategies of promotion, persuasion and legitimacy. Locally, in Bde chen TAP, one notes the symptomatic spread of new Shangri-La-titled tourist periodicals, articles and even pieces of literature.[8] On the national level, diverse editorial initiatives have been launched to make the Shangri-La campaign effective. In May 2002, for example, Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House published *Mi yul gyi dag pa'i zhing khams* (lit. *The Pure Land of Human Beings*),[9] a Tibetan translation of *Lost Horizon*, James Hilton's 1933 novel, which, together with Frank Capra's film adaptation of 1937, has largely contributed to the construction of the Western 'myth of Tibet' and the invention of the word and world of Shangri-La. The Tibetan translation of *Lost Horizon* in the PRC follows a series of successful Chinese translations of Western exploratory and 'myth-making' works on the Yunnan Tibetan region appearing throughout the late 1990s and the early 2000s. Examples include several Chinese versions of *Lost Horizon*,[10] Alexandra David-Néel's *Voyage d'une parisienne à Lhassa*,[11] Prince Henry d'Orléans's, *Aux Sources de*

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has nothing to do with the Shangri-La-like natural beauty of Tibet, the spiritual magnanimity of Tibetan people, and the richness of popular tradition there. All these are qualities that only in the present-day socialist environment can fully develop in Tibet.

[7] According to Chinese sources and WWF reports (see WWF 2003), in 2002, over 1,280,000 tourists visited Shangri-La area, a rise of about 10% over the previous year and more than double the county's entire population. In 2002 tourism brought in Y 3,882,900 (US$ 474,000) to the main city of Shangri-La, a rise of 37% from the previous year.

[8] I describe later in this article the symptomatic transformations of *Yuanye magazine*.

[9] See Gter ma Tshe ring chos 'phel 2002.

[10] Among the several Chinese translations of *Lost Horizon*, see, for example: Zheng 1991, and He 2000. Frank Capra's movie, *Lost Horizon*, was first distributed in China in Chinese in the early 1940s, under the Chinese title of *Taohua yuan yan ji* 桃花源艳迹 (*The Gorgeous Vestige of the Land of Peach Blossoms*). The movie became a hit, and it inspired a song called *Zhe meili de Xianggelila* (*This Beautiful Shangri-La*) which was a hit in the 1940s, especially in South China.

[11] See Geng 1997. For the French original, see David-Néel 1999.

l'Irrouaddi: D'Hanoi à Calcutta par terre,[12] several books on Joseph Rock's research activities in Yunnan,[13] and a few translations of Joseph Rock's main works.

In this paper—on the basis of interviews with Tibetan writers and publishers carried out during fieldwork in Yunnan Tibetan areas (September–October 2002), and through a critical reading of an ensemble of literary publications collected during fieldwork—I analyse Tibetan literary life and cultural activities in Bde chen TAP in the second half of the twentieth century. This gives me the opportunity to outline the cultural evolution of a little-studied frontier region which has traditionally represented the farthest south-eastern outskirts of the Tibetan cultural world. In this paper, after broadly introducing the pre-Maoist sociocultural environment of Northwestern Yunnan, I describe the construction of the socialist literary infrastructure there. I then introduce several Yunnan Tibetan writers and editors, focusing on their creative and editorial initiatives in Tibetan and Chinese writing. I particularly focus on questions of literary *agency* and *locality* seen in a comparative perspective with the other Tibetan spheres of literature in the PRC.[14]

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[12] See Guo 2001 (2nd ed.: 2002). Guo's Chinese translation is based on the original French version written by the geographer Emile Roux, one of the two companions of Prince Henri d'Orléans during his expedition from Hanoi to Calcutta via Yunnan overland between 1895 and 1986. It is interesting to note that the literary meaning of the Chinese title of Guo's translation, *Yong bu momie de fengjing Xianggelila. Bai nian qian yi ge Faguo tanxianjia de huiyi* (lit. *Shangri-La, An Indelible Scenery. The Centennial Memories of a French Explorer*), anachronistically alludes to Shangri-La to describe Henri d'Orléans' adventures which took place half a century before Hilton's creation of Shangri-La! Roux's *Aux sources de l'Irrouadi* French original was first published in *Le Tour du monde*. Paris: 1897, 3 (17–23): 193–276, with an appendix abstracted from Prince Henri d'Orléans' own book, *From Tonkin to India by the Sources of the Irouadi, 1895–1896*. London: 1898. For the first English translation of Roux's book, see Tips 1999.

[13] For some Chinese publications on J. Rock, see Wang 2003, and several works by He Weijian (the translator of *Lost Horizon* in Chinese, cf. He 2000). The bibliographical details of He's works are unfortunately unknown; I was personally given an incomplete list by He Weijian. That list contains the following translations and essays: *Yuesefu Luoke zai Zhongguo* (*Joseph Rock in China*); *Xunzhao Luoke de shijie* (*Looking for the World of Rock*); *Yuesefu Luoke chuanji de shentan shengya* (*The Wonderful research career of Joseph Rock*), etc. He also wrote a work on Hilton's *Lost Horizon*: *Xierdun bixia de Xianggelila* (*Hilton's Shangri-La*).

[14] PRC Tibetan contemporary literature (mainly written in Chinese) has been the subject of my personal research since 1996. In this paper, I focus on Yunnan Tibetan

As far as methodology is concerned, I adopt a comparative ethno-literary approach, and I pay particular attention to the multilayered interactions between the macro and micro contexts in Bde chen TAP. My analyses of the literary life and activities in contemporary Bde chen TAP take into consideration the complex relationships that this frontier region have traditionally entertained with Central Tibet and China, but also with the other highly diverse locales within the Khams region and the multiethnic environment of Yunnan province. The *frontier* specificities of Bde chen TAP are here taken into account as a discursive process.

1. A World in Between: Introduction to Bde chen TAP

1.1. *Geopolitical Configuration*

The Bde chen TAP is the only Tibetan TAP in Yunnan province, and one of a total of eight Nationalities Autonomous Prefectures in this province.[15] It is situated in the northwestern corner of Yunnan where China, Tibet and Burma meet. It covers an area of approximately 23,870 square meters, and has a population of 330,000 inhabitants, 33% of whom are Tibetans.[16] Bde chen TAP consists of three counties: Shangri-La county (Rgyal thang; Ch. Xianggelila xian 香格里拉县) where Shangri-La, the seat of the prefectural government, is located; Deqin county ('Jol lung; Ch. Deqin xian

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contemporary literary life and activities not only because of the actuality of Shangri-La, but also because our information on the Yunnan Tibetan world of literature are generally full of lacunae. No studies are available on this subject and Tibetan intellectuals themselves only marginally know Bde chen TAP literature. Generally speaking, all the diverse locales that constitute the Khams region need more close consideration (see Epstein 2002).

[15] Besides Bde chen TAP, the other 7 Autonomous Prefectures (AP) in Yunnan province are: Wenshan Zhuang and Miao AP, Honghe Hani and Yi AP, Sipsong Panna Tai AP, Chuxiong Yi AP, Dali Bai AP, Dehong Tai and Jingpo AP, Nüjiang Lisu AP.

[16] According to the 2002 PRC census data, Yunnan province has a population of 42,360,089 inhabitants, 0.3% of whom are Tibetans, 66.6% are Han, 11.1% are Yi, 1.5% are Hui, and 20.5% are 'Others' (that is Miao, Yao and Zhuang). The entire population of Tibetans within China was estimated to be 5,416,021. In the TAR, the total was 2,427,168, in Sichuan, 1,269,120, in Qinghai, 1,086,592, in Gansu, 443,228, in Yunnan, 128, 432. (See TIN 2003)

德钦县), and Weixi Lisu Autonomous County (’Ba’ lung; Ch. Weixi lisuzu zizhixian 维西 傈族自治县).[17] It traditionally includes the territory crossed by three parallel rivers: the Golden Sand River (’Bri chu; Ch. Jinsha jiang 金沙江), the Mekong (Zla chu, Ch. Lancang jiang 澜沧江) and the Salween (Ch. Nujiang 怒江). To the West lies the Smin gling Mountain Range (Ch. Meili xueshan 梅里雪山), whose highest and holiest peak is Kha ba dkar po. Bde chen TAP was officially created on 13 September 1957 after the ‘liberation’ of the region by the Chinese communists forces in 1950.

Very little is known of the history, ethnology and culture of the northwestern frontier area of Yunnan province.[18] Historically, it lies at the juncture of Tibetan and Chinese territories, and has been the site of continual conflict due to both Chinese and Tibetan expansionist policies. The Sino-Tibetan multiethnic fringe populations in northwestern Yunnan have experienced more of a cultural than a political integration into the Tibetan world. The Chinese at different periods tried to control areas of a rebellious tendency, which in their definition were ‘tributary’ to China, but over which the Chinese had only nominal control. The Tibetans extended their presence to northwestern Yunnan, but their control varied considerably through the centuries.

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[17] Considering the traditional Tibetan geo-political configuration within the Tibetan world of culture—Mnga’ ris *bskor gsum*, Dbus gtsang *ru bzhi*, Mdo Khams (Mdo stod / Mdo smad) *gangs drug*—Yunnan Tibetan areas are usually referred to as consisting of three of the six *gangs* of Mdo Khams, that is Spo ’bo *gangs* (approximately corresponding to present day Shangri-La county), Smar khams *gangs* (approximately corresponding to present day Deqin county and beyond), Tsha ba *gangs* (approximately corresponding to the east slope of the Kha ba dkar po range).

[18] From the end of the 19th c. until the mid 20th c., only a few explorers cum scholars—such as the French missionaries of the Foreign Missions Society of Paris (which was created in 1846 and began its activities in 1854), Jacques Bacot, Francis Goré, Joseph F. Rock, etc.—reached the upper reaches of the Mekong and the Salween in Yunnan. They provided some detailed information about the geographical, cultural and political specificities of a region which still remains a marginal field of study. The Lijiang region, inhabited by the Nakhi (Ch. Naxi), and which history and culture is closely connected with Tibet, has been better studied. For more information on the complex history and geopolicy of Northwest Yunnan, see Bacot 1909, Bacot 1912, Goré 1923, Rocher 1899, Rock 1947, Wiens 1954, Moseley 1973, Backus 1981, Gros 1996, and Gros 2001. For an introduction to Chinese nationalist considerations on the Yunnan, Khams and Tibetan questions, see Siguret 1937.

As early as the 7th century, at the time of the apogee of the Tibetan empire, and during the Tang dynasty in China (618–907), the Chinese started a policy of gradual penetration into the northwest fringes of Yunnan to contain Tibetan expansion. The Dunhuang Tibetan annals[19] confirm that by 703 the Tibetans had extended their domination as far as the Erhai lake region and established their authority over ’Jang yul (approximately North Lijiang).[20] A stone tablet inscription in ancient Tibetan discovered in 1992 at Gezi 格子 village (near Lijiang) confirms that at that time, ’Jang sa tham betrayed the Tang to pledge its allegiance to the Tibetan empire.[21] By 750, with the agreement of the Chinese Emperor, the Nanzhao kingdom came to power but it rapidly reinforced its relation with Tibet. The alliance between Nanzhao and Tibet culminated in a series of massive Tibeto-Nanzhao invasions into Sichuan which endangered Tang China. At the beginning of the 10th century the Nanzhao kingdom was replaced by the Dali kingdom (902), which, in 1253, was defeated by the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1206–1367). The Mongols established an alliance with the Nakhi, with the Nakhi king therefore becoming a vassal of the Mongol emperor. He was known under the patronymic name of Mu (1382). The old ’Jiang sa tham became Lijiang, which thereafter centralised political authority over Northwest Yunnan. At the same time, strong links were established between the Nakhi and some religious authorities in Tibet, mainly the Karma pa.[22]

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[19] See the translation of Dunhuang old Tibetan annals: Thomas 1935, Thomas 1951, Thomas 1955, and Bacot, Thomas and Toussaint 1940–1946.

[20] It is difficult to know how far direct Tibetan authority extended into Yunnan during the 8th century. Probably, the furthest Tibetan outpost was at Shenchuan, located immediately north of the iron-chain suspension bridge across the Upper Yangtze at Tieqiao. According to Backus (Backus 1981), indirect Tibetan control must have extended much further. See also Moseley 1973: 11–32; Rocher 1899, Wiens 1954.

[21] See Wang 2001b, Wang 2003b, Dolha 2003.

[22] Between the 15th and the 17th centuries, the Mu family of Lijiang highly supported the Karma pa installation in the Yunnan mountain region. This began by 1400, when Master Zhimeiba 支梅巴 (Tib.?) became the preceptor of Ade 阿德 *tusi* of Lijiang. With the patronage of the Mu family, several Bka’ rgyud scriptures were edited: *Skyabs ’gro bdun cu pa* (*Guiyi song* 皈依颂), ? (*Bai dumu zan* 白度 母赞), *Rdo rje Phag mo* (*Jingang haimu* 金刚亥母), ? (*Da shouyin qiqing wen* 大手印祈请文), etc.

Under the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the Mu family of Lijiang launched a series of military conquest towards the Yunnan Tibetan marches, and was victorious in its northward expansion (1548, 1561). Northwest Yunnan returned to the Dalai Lama's rule at the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). The 5th Dalai Lama (1617–1682) was ruler of Tibet at that time.[23] Most of the Karma Bka' rgyud monasteries of Northwest Yunnan were then converted into Dge lugs monasteries (as Bde chen gling and Don grub gling, for example), and new Dge lugs monasteries were *ex novo* built (as Srong btsan gling, built in Rgyal thang in 1679). Following the Nakhi incursions into Smar khams Sgar thog, 'Ba' thang and Li thang (Eastern Tibet), and the large-scale conquest launched by emperor Kangxi, the Yunnan Tibetan marches returned to Qing China. Chinese armies reached Lhasa in 1720, establishing the Chinese protectorate over Tibet.

Wim van Spengen (2002), in his recent article on banditry and war in the multy-ethnic fringe lands of southern Khams, gives an insightful historical description of the southern Khams region at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Van Spengen focuses on the conspicuous growth of Tibetan brigandage and banditry in the region, on the siege of Sampiling in 1906 and the establishment of tight Manchu control in the person of Zhao Erfeng, the 'Warden of the Marches' (2002). Tibetan brigandage and banditry in southern Khams lasted throughout the first half of the 20th century. Zhongdian (modern Shangri-La) was an important centre of frontier robbery at that time. The Chinese nationalist government failed to bring peace in southern Khams, but was able to introduce, into the agitated Northwestern Yunnan region, the administrative organisation that would be inherited by the Maoists in 1949 with the foundation of the

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[23] Between 1442 and 1674, the Yunnan Tibetan region suffered from recurrent wars and incursions. In 1639, an ally among the 5th Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama and Gushi khan put an end to the Karma bka' rgyud influence in the region. That same year, by a decree in 4 languages (Chinese, Tibetan, Mongol and Manchu), the 5th Dalai Lama announced his regaining power on 'Ba' thang and Li thang (in Sichuan), Adunzi (modern Deqin), Zhongdian and Lijiang (in Yunnan). Under Central Tibetan rule, the Yunnan Tibetan region was given new Tibetan toponyms which replaced those given by the Nakhi: Zhongdian became Rgyal thang, Weixi 为习 (also called Nina 你那) became 'Ba' lung, A dun zi 阿墩子 (modern Deqin) became 'Jol lung.

PRC.[24] But the Maoist epics in northwest Yunnan—as Chinese sources often underline—started in April 1936 when, during the Long March, the 2nd Front Army of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army crossed the 'Bri chu (Ch. Jinsha jiang) and reached Rgyal thang and Bde chen, thus sowing the 'seeds of the revolution'.[25]

1.2. *Cultural and Linguistic Considerations*

It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe the complex evolution of the cultural tradition in the Yunnan Tibetan marches through the centuries. It suffices here to point out two relevant literature-related considerations. On the one hand, there is the recent tendency in Yunnan Tibetan publications to emphasise the specificities of the local Tibetan cultural heritage and to neglect the Chinese cultural influence in the region.[26] Some articles highlight more historically salient Tibet-related features of Bde chen TAP,[27] while other articles adopt a more literary approach and put emphasis on the rich local Tibetan literary tradition.[28] On the other hand, there is the local high

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[24] In 1912, Zhongdian and Weixi became counties (*xian*) under the administration of Yunnan, and in 1913, Adunzi (modern Deqin county) became an administrative council (*xingzheng weiyuan*). In 1932, Adunzi administration was given the name of Deqin locality (Deqin ju) from Bde chen gling monastery in the nearby.

[25] For an interesting account of the Tibetan pre-1949 communist activities in Northwest Yunnan, see Goldstein, Sherap and Siedenschuh 2004: 90–125.

[26] See, for example, Wang 2000, Xu 2000, Zhang 2002.

[27] Recurrent themes in those articles include: the discovering in 1992 of the Gezi stone tablet inscription in ancient Tibetan near Lijiang; the pilgrimages of the 2nd and 3rd Black Hat Karma pa, Karma Pag shi (1206–1283) and Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), to Kha ba dkar po; the origin of the toponym 'Rgyal thang' attributed to the 7th Dalai Lama Skal bzang rgya mtsho (1708–1757); the edition of the Li thang Bka' 'gyur (1609–1611) which wooden printing blocks were carved in Rgyal thang under the patronage of the king of 'Jang sa tham (Lijiang); the consecration of the Li thang Bka' 'gyur by the 6th Zhwa dmar pa Chos kyi dbang phyug (1584–1638) in Rgyal thang Khang sar in 1614; the lives of the three Dga' ldan *khri ba* from Yunnan, cf. Don grub dpag bsam (1546–1620), dGe 'dun rin chen (?–1642), Dge 'dun chucheng? (1744–1807); the visit of the 10th Panchen Lama Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1938–1989) to 'Jol (Deqin county) and Kha ba dkar po in October 1986; etc. (see Wang 2000, Xu 2000, Zhang 2002, Rin chen rdo rje 1999).

[28] See Xu 2000. This article contains a long list of Tibetan writings kept in Yunnan Tibetan Dge lugs, Karma bka' 'gyur and Rnying ma monasteries before

rate of illiteracy in Tibetan (possibly the highest of all the Tibetan regions in the PRC), due to the multicultural history of the Northwestern Yunnan frontier region, a certain élitism of the pre-1949 Tibetan traditional education system, and the linguistic policies implemented by successive Chinese governments there. The large-scale promotion of education in Chinese became a priority of the Communist government in 1949 when the CCP wanted to establish a homogenised, socialist national education system reaching all social classes and all corners of the PRC.[29] New free open schools—conducted in Chinese and led by the Party—were started in the Yunnan Tibetan marches beginning in the early 1950s, and traditional Tibetan education (which was addressed to a more select number of students) was marginalised. The result of such a policy in Bde chen TAP has been that, despite the local Tibetan dialect continuing to be widely spoken among Yunnan Tibetans, Tibetan creative literature since the Maoist take-over has almost exclusively featured literature written by Tibetans in Chinese, rather than literature written in Tibetan. There are still a few intellectuals and writers who are educated in Tibetan in Bde chen TAP, but because they do not have a Tibetan readership, they almost exclusively write in Chinese.[30]

1966. Xu says nothing about the present day state of preservation of those writings and monasteries.

[29] By 1950 the PRC government had established 45 special nationalities primary schools and 8 provincial nationalities secondary schools in the whole PRC. See Hansen 1999.

[30] I develop this point later in this article. The general marginalisation of the Tibetan language in the present day context of the PRC, is a problem which concerns the ensemble of the Tibetan regions in the PRC. But compared with other Tibetan cultural regions (A mdo, for instance), the situation of illiteracy in Tibetan in Bde chen TAP is much more serious, and it has been denounced in a few articles by local Tibetan intellectuals [see Bu 1994; Wang (unknown date), and Li (unknown date)]. The large-scale illiteracy in Tibetan in Bde chen TAP is generally attributed to the lack of qualified teachers and infrastructures, and to the little utility and use of Tibetan in the local everyday political, social and economical life. According to Bu (1994: 115), Bde chen monasteries too are seriously concerned by the problem of illiteracy in Tibetan. This is even more questioning if one thinks that minority education policy in Yunnan is generally open toward the use of minority languages. The Yunnan Institute of the Nationalities, for example, offers classes in Sipsong Panna Tai, Dehong Tai, Jingpo, Lisu, Lahu, Yi and Wa languages (see Hansen

Several sources however, indicate that the traditional Tibetan monastic institution was able to keep the monopoly of education in northwest Yunnan until the establishment of the PRC in 1949, and show that in pre-Maoist years, neither traditional nor modern Chinese education appealed to Tibetans in a significant way (see Siguret 1937, Bu 1994, Hansen 1999). Chinese Confucian education, for instance, was imparted in private schools in Lijiang since the Yuan dynasty, together with Tibetan monastic education. It was highly reputed in the Lijiang region until the early 1950s, but the Tibetans seem to have been only marginally interested. According to Siguret (1937), between 1906 and 1907, the vice-prefect of Lijiang instituted classes of modern education and Chinese language for twenty monks from Dong grub gling monastery (Weixi county) in order to initiate them into modern education. That initiative however was soon abandoned and produced no significant results. In 1909, Zhao Erfeng built the first Chinese school in Southern Khams to contain the power of the monastic establishment and to introduce modern education there.[31] It had little success however, and Wang Turui 王图瑞, the Chinese official posted in northwest Yunnan by 1930 (Siguret 1937: 22–25), complained about the Chinese illiteracy of Rgyal thang people. We know that there were ten Chinese primary schools in northwest Yunnan by 1930, but they offered a poor level of instruction (Siguret 1937, Bu 1994).

The little interest of northwest Yunnan Tibetans in traditional and modern Chinese education in pre-1949 years paralleled the alienation between the Tibetan and Chinese spheres of literature there. We know, for instance, that a tradition of Chinese frontier poetry (biansai shige 边塞 诗歌) by the local Nakhi and Han officials posted on the

1999). A Sino-American program of co-operation for the preservation of the engendered minority languages of Yunnan was launched in 1999 with the creation of a database of Yunnan engendered languages. But Tibetan is not included in the programme (see Chen 2003).

[31] The Bureau of Education of Border Regions (*Yanbian xuewu ju*) was set up in Yunnan in 1909 with the purpose of promoting new schools in Yunnan border regions and facilitating the integration of local people into the empire. By the end of the Qing, the bureau had started 128 free schools with a total of 3,974 students in the whole Yunnan province. The majority of students were Jingpo, Lisu, Achang, Akha and Tai. The number of Tibetans seems to have been very marginal. See Hansen 1999.

Yunnan fringes of the Tibetan plateau developed in the Rgyal thang, ’Jol and Weixi areas at least since the early years of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911).[32] But local Tibetan literati seem to have remained quite impermeable to that Chinese literary tradition. Later, by 1920, the ideas of the May Fourth Movement increasingly influenced the culture and education in the Lijiang region. Young Nakhi teachers educated in Beijing started a study group on modern literature called the ‘New Lijiang Study Society’ (Xin Lijiang dushuhui 新漓江读书会) in Lijiang. But again, those early modern literary activities in Lijiang had a very marginal influence on the culture of the neighbouring Rgyal thang Tibetan region. It was only in the early 1950s, when the Party opened new free schools in Chinese, that a growing number of Tibetan children from northwest Yunnan started to go to Chinese schools and work for the ‘construction of socialism’. Among those early Yunnan Tibetan young recruits, there was Rab rgyas dpag sams who was to become one of the most representative voices of Tibetan socialist sinophone poetry in the PRC.

2. TIBETAN LITERARY LIFE AND ACTIVITIES IN BDE CHEN TAP: 1950–1980

The study of Tibetan literary life and activities in the Yunnan Tibetan region between 1950 and 1980 includes two main subjects of investigation: the organisation of large-scale folk literature studies everywhere in China, and particularly in northwest Yunnan; and the emergence, in the field of literary creation, of a young Tibetan sinophone poet from Bde chen county, Rab rgyas dpags sams (Ch. Raojie Basang 饶阶巴桑, b.1935). The virtual absence of Tibetan language writers in the Yunnan Tibetan region between 1950 and 1980 needs to be particularly highlighted here. A renewed awareness of the importance of launching Tibetan education in Bde chen TAP started spreading in 1987, after the Panchen Lama’s visit to the region.

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[32] For a detailed description of Yunnan frontier poetry, see Gao 1992.

The organisation of large-scale folk literature studies in all China in the early years of the PRC was connected with the political situation and literary policy of the newly established Maoist government. In those years, the Yunnan Tibetan marches beyond the Lijiang region were *terrae incognitae* to the new Maoist leadership. The first need of the government was to explore the remote territories of the PRC and identify non-Han peoples and their culture there. A large-scale research program was then organised, and linguistics, ethnographers and historians were sent to all the regions where the nationalities were settled. Their political-cum-cultural mission there included the collection, translation and edition of folk literature of the nationalities. In the Yunnan Tibetan region—as well as in other Tibetan regions of the PRC—the bulk of the literary fieldwork consisted mainly in the collection of oral and written episodes of the Gesar epics.[33] Studies in the Yunnan tradition of the Gesar epics were particularly supported by the PCC authority because that tradition was shared by several nationalities in Yunnan (cf. Nakhi, Lisu, etc.) and elsewhere in the PRC (cf. the Mongols). In the eyes of the government, the shared cultural heritage of Gesar corroborated the Maoist discourse of the unity among nationalities in the PRC.

It is important to note here that in the 1950s, the PCC apparatus was still in the phase of construction, the spreading tentacles of the PCC bureaucracy were not yet fully installed everywhere in China. In the Tibetan mountain region of Rgyal thang, ’Jol and Weixi, for instance, no literary infrastructure was created before the early 1980s.[34] The first specialised Center of Gesar studies was created in Zhongdian (modern Shangri-La) only in 1983. In previous years, the Deqin county Cultural Mansion (*Deqin xian wenhua guan*)—which was more a centre of propaganda than a centre for the development of culture—served as the headquarters for fieldwork research on the

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[33] Under the direction of Li Zhaoji, He Qiang, and Xie Shiyi, 11 volumes of diverse episodes of the Gesar epic (including oral and written, manuscripts and xylographic versions) were collected in Yunnan in the 1950s. Eleven bards were identified as well. Li Zhaoji himself hid the collected materials during the Cultural Revolution preserving them from destruction. (See Wang 1997: 51–55.) For a detailed description of the history and significance of the Gesar studies in the PRC, see Maconi 2003.

[34] See later in this article.

Gesar epic in Yunnan. Equally, Tibetan creative writers from Northwest Yunnan, could but rely on provincial or national literary structures to launch their works and acquire literary recognition.[35] Before 1982, there were no official newspapers and magazines at prefectural and county levels in Bde chen TAP.[36]

In this context of socialist construction where folk culture was the priority and literature had to teach people to become ‘red and expert’, Rab rgyas dpag sams emerged as the only Tibetan socialist writer from Northwest Yunnan capable of winning all-China recognition after the Maoist takeover in 1949. He was to remain the only Yunnan Tibetan writer of a certain renown till the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s. Born in a little village of what is now modern Deqin county (Tib. ’Jol), at the age of sixteen (1951), Rab rgyas dpag sams joined the Chinese army to escape from the monastery where he served a lama. The army gave him some education (only in Chinese), and the possibility of travelling and starting a career as a poet. He became a pioneer in the field of Tibetan socialist literature and an activist for the development of revolutionary literature in the PRC.[37] Together with a few other Tibetan revolutionaries cum writers from A mdo and Khams (cf. Skal bzang rdo rje, b.1936, from Qinghai; and Bstan bdzin sgom po, 1934–1996, from Labrang, etc.), he participated to the ‘National Meeting of the Young Activists of Literary Creation’ (*Quanguo qingnian wenxue chuangzuozhe jijifenzi huiyi* 全国青年文学创作者积极分子会议) organised by the League of the Young Communists in Beijing in April 1956. This was one of the founding meetings for the definition and construction of the new revolutionary literature in the PRC. That same year (1956), for the first time, one of Rab rgyas dpag sams’s poems, “The Reverie of an Herdsman” (Muren de

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[35] The Yunnan Federation of Arts and Literature and its annexed literary magazine *Bianjiang wenyi* (*Frontiers Arts and Literature*), were both created in Kunming in 1956.

[36] See later in this article.

[37] Rab rgyas dpag sams is considered as one of the ‘Great Five’ Tibetan poets who have been active in the PRC since the early 1950s. The other four Tibetan poets are: Awang Sidanzhen (Sichuan, Aba; b.1929), Yidan Cairang (Qinghai, b.1933), Danzhen Gongbu (Gannan, 1934–1997), Gesang Duojie (Qinghai, b.1936).

huanxiang 牧人的幻想),[38] was published in the newly created Kunming-based *Frontiers Arts and literature* magazine (*Bianjiang wenyi* 边疆文艺). But Rab rgyas dpag sams's official consecration on the alter of Chinese poetry occurred in 1961 when the famous Chinese poet Zang Kejia 臧克家[39] (b.1905) published a critical article in the prestigious *Poetry Magazine* (*Shikan* 诗刊) which dealt with the talent of few young poets (including Rab rgyas dpag sams), and commented on some of his poems.[40] Since then, Rab rgyas dpag sams has never stopped writing. Political eulogising and military life are surely important themes of his literary production. But his poetry also shows more intimate sources, such as his unconditional and impetuous temperament, his unquenchable first for travelling, his love for Tibet and Tibetan nature, and his familiarity with the Tibetan tradition of popular literature, etc. Up to the present day, Rab rgyas dpag sams has published four collections of poems: *The Grassland Collection* (*Caoyuan ji* 草原集, 1960), *Paraffin Candles* (*Shi zhu* 石烛, 1982), *Longing for the Buds* (*Dui shengye zhi lian* 对生叶之恋, 1982), and *The Petals of Love* (*Ai de huaban* 爱的花瓣, 1984).[41]

3. TIBETAN LITERARY LIFE AND ACTIVITIES IN BDE CHEN TAP: 1980–2002

3.1. *Bde chen TAP Federation of Arts and Literature and Open Country Magazine*

The Bde chen TAP Federation of Arts and Literature (Diqing zhou wenlian 迪庆州文联)—which keeps control of cultural life in Bde chen TAP, including the prefectural Writers Union—was created in Zhongdian (modern Shangri-La) in 1982 together with its annexed

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[38] See Raojie Basang 1956.

[39] Zang Kejia was born in Shandong province in 1905. He began publishing poetry in 1926 as a disciple of the widely known poet Wen Yiduo. His first collection of poems, *Laoyin* (*Brand*), appeared in 1933. A twelve-volume edition of Zang Kejia's works written between 1926 and 2001 was published by Beijing Shidai chubanshe in 2003.

[40] See Zang 1961; quoted in Geng 1994: 31.

[41] See Raojie Basang 1960, 1982, 1982b, 1984.

literary magazine, *Open Country* (*Yuanye* 原野). *Open Country* is in Chinese (it has a Tibetan subtitle: *Klung thang*), and is the only official literary periodical ever published in the whole of Bde chen TAP. No Tibetan language magazines are published in Bde chen TAP, neither officially nor unofficially.[42] The Shangri-La prefectural capital is the directive and coordinating centre of all literary life in Bde chen prefecture. County level propaganda bureaux and houses of culture (in Weixi and Deqin counties) have but a representative function. Their state funding is insufficient to launch important literary activities or create county literary magazines.[43]

The editorial policy of *Open Country* magazine consists of some politico-literary directives (such as the 'three favours' and the 'five priorities')[44] which show a conception which strongly focuses on the 'local specificities' of literature. Positive discrimination—which favours the publication of works by Tibetan local writers—is a recurrent editorial device too. In *Open Country* magazine, works by non-Bde chen writers are rare, and translations of foreign literature are totally absent.[45] This 'autist' editorial policy—which is typical of

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[42] In the whole Yunnan province, there are three literary magazines in national minorities languages, two are in Tai language and one in Jingpo language.

[43] The Bde chen County Propaganda Bureau and the Bde chen Cultural Mansion in 1986, launched the trial issue of *Kha ba dkar po* (*Kawagebo* 喀瓦格博), a literary magazine of modern creative literature which was suppressed after the publication of the first issue in 1987 because of lack of government funding.

[44] The 'three favours' (*san ge wei zhu*) and the 'five priorities' (*wu xian wu rang*) are norms which regulate the selection of texts which are likely to be published in *Open Country*. According to the 'three favours', editors must: 1) 'favour local writers' (*bendi zuozhe wei zhu*), 2) 'favour local subject matter' (*bendi ticai wei zhu*), 3) 'favour local readership' (*bendi duzhe wei zhu*). The 'five priorities' establish that: 1) pieces of literature by writers who do not work as editors in a given magazine take priority over texts written by editor-writers; 2) pieces of literature by Bde chen writers take priority over texts by non-Bde chen writers; 3) pieces of literature by minority writers take priority on texts written by Han writers; 4) pieces of literature by young writers take priority on texts written by senior writers; 5) pieces of literature by women writers take priority over texts written by men writers of minority extraction. A tacit norm—based on the fact that politically, Bde chen is a 'Tibetan' prefecture—consists of giving absolute priority to the publication of any piece of literature by Tibetan writers.

[45] Considering the totality of the issues of *Open Country* which I have reviewed, I could find only one foreign translation of a short story by an Italian fashion designer, Elsa Schiaparelli (1890–1973), who is far from being an outstanding figure of Italian

the literary policy for nationalities in all the PRC—has accentuated the marginality of nationalities literature in the PRC, and has hindered its evolution in terms of both quality and attractiveness. In the Tibetan case, the increasing poverty in literary quality of sinophone magazines has brought about the patent disaffection of the readership, and the subsequent serious threat of suppressing local literary publications.[46]

All the writers and intellectuals I met in Bde chen TAP in 2002 agreed in saying that the years between 1982 and 1987 constituted the most flourishing period of local Tibetan literature, and the best period for *Open Country* magazine, in terms of both editorial openness and literary quality. After 1987, a phase of decline has started, it is still going on. The literary fervour in Bde chen TAP in the 1980s is generally attributed to the considerable literary enterprise of Yu Guoxian 俞国贤 (1943–1993), a sinophone Tibetan writer from Bde chen who started publishing poems in the 1960s when militating in the army. In 1982, he became the President of the newly created Bde chen TAP Federation of Arts and Literature, and the editor in chief of *Open Country* magazine. Yu Guoxian was considered to be a charismatic leader by local Tibetan young writers. As a writer, he obtained some success in 1981 with the publication of the novella *Full Moon* (*Yueyuan* 月圆)[47] which tells the love story of Bkra shis—the son of a couple of Han intellectuals sent to the Tibetan marches during the Cultural Revolution—and Me tog, a local Tibetan girl of humble extraction.

Yu Guoxian's principal concern as an intellectual was the creation of a propitious literary environment in Bde chen to develop local creative literature activities. He was very active locally, organising

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literature. She used to work as a script writer in the USA before moving to Paris in the late 1920s to open a fashion boutique. For a Schiaparelli's Chinese translation, see Huang 1995.

[46] This is particularly true for Chinese language literary magazines published in the PRC Tibetan areas. *Xizang wenyi* in Lhasa, *Gesang hua* in Hezuo (Gansu), *Gongga shan* in Kangding, *Yuanye* in Shangri-La, all these magazines are menaced of suppression because of a serious lack of readership and a sensible reduction of state funding. Official Tibetan language magazines, on the contrary, are still fully supported by the state, and their funds have been recently increased.

[47] See Yu 1982.

workshops, conferences, ateliers etc., but he had frequent contact with writers and editors from other Tibetan provinces too, with Yi dam tshe ring,[48] for instance, and Gong Qiaoming 龚巧明.[49] He was the only Tibetan writer from Yunnan who always participated to the literary conferences of the five Tibetan provinces held in the PRC throughout the 1980s.

Yu Guoxian's retirement from the literary scene in 1987 corresponded to the beginning of the decline of the literary fervour in Bde chen TAP. Yang Sen 杨森, a Nakhi writer from Bde chen TAP, took the chair of the Bde chen Federation of Arts and Literature between 1988 and 1999. His menagement of the Bde chen TAP literary enterprise has been highly criticised by local intellectuals, by Tibetans in particular. Yang Sen is said to marginalise Tibetan literature, to adopt a suicidal editorial policy, and to practise an unprofitable management of state funds. As a consequence, Tibetan writers—taking advantage of the creation of the literary supplement in *Bde chen News* (*Diqing bao*) in 1989—started boycotting *Open Country* magazine to contribute to the literary supplement of *Bde chen News.* The crises at the heart of the Bde chen Federation of Arts and Literature reached a climax in 1999 when Yang Sen sold *Open Country* magazine to the Kunming-based 'Everybody Magazine Advertising Company' (*Dajia zazhi guanggao gongsi*) which is a branch of the Yunnan People Publishing House. He was then forced to resign, but *Open Country*, the only literary magazine in Bde chen TAP, was definitively lost. Since 1999, there has been a power vacuum at the head of the Bde chen Federation of Arts and Literature, and a provisory commission of five volunteers has been conferred consultative and decisional power for important questions. Since then, *Open Country* magazine, under the direction of its new Kunming managers, has undergone a gradual four-year (1999–2003) conversion into a tourist cultural magazine which focuses on the promotion of Shangri-La. The late *Open Country* is now entitled *Shangri-La: The Friend of Tourists* (*Xianggelila, luyouzhe zhi you*

[48] For a description of Yi dam tshe ring (b.1933) and his literature, see Maconi 2002.

[49] Gong Qiaoming was a brilliant woman editor cum writer in Lhasa in the 1980s. She tragically died in 1987 in a car accident on the way to Rkong po.

香格里拉旅游者之友), it was officially launched in January 2003. So far, no other literary periodical has replaced *Open Country* magazine in Shangri-La.[50]

3.2. *Tibetan Writers from Bde chen TAP*

The majority of Tibetan writers in Bde chen TAP are members of the Bde chen TAP Federation of Arts and Literature, but none of them is a professional writer. They generally work in the field of culture, education and edition, some of them have political responsibilities, and some are members of the army (even if they no longer participate to military activities). A large majority of Bde chen Tibetan writers are illiterate in Tibetan and write in Chinese. Only few of them are bilingual (Sino-Tibetan), but when writing creative literary texts or academic papers, they all write in Chinese to reach a larger readership. Their contribution to Tibetan language literature concerns more editorial projects of translations and adaptations of Tibetan folk literature than creative writing. Four young tibetophone intellectuals cum writers stand out in the Bde chen TAP world of culture, they are: Bkra shis don grub (b.1963, better known as Bai Yuxian 白玉先) and Byang pa tshe dbang (better known as Li Xiangyong 李向勇) whose editorial activities at *Bde chen tshags par* I describe later in this paper; Tshe ring dbang ’dus (b.1950, better known as Wang Xiaosong 王晓松), possibly one of the most brilliant researcher in Bde chen Tibetan culture, and the translator of a remarkable annotated bilingual Sino-Tibetan edition of *Stories Told by the*

[50] At the end of 1998—while Yang Sen was in negotiations with the Kunming ‘Everybody Magazine Advertising Company’ to sell *Open Country* magazine, and before the conversion of *Open Country* into *Shangri-La: The Friend of Tourists*—a new tourist cultural magazine entitled *Shangri-La* (Ch. *Xianggelila*) had already been launched in Bde chen TAP by the well-known Nakhi poet Renlangge (also called Li Chenghan). The publication of Renlangge’s *Shangri-La* was competitive with the Kunming company project of converting *Open Country* magazine into a new *Shangri-La* magazine. The two *Shangri-La* magazines would be too similar. Consequently, under the pressure of the Kunming managers, the publication of Renlangge’s *Shangri-La* was forbidden. In 2001, Renlangge relaunched his *Shangri-La* magazine so that in Bde chen TAP, there are now two similar tourist cultural magazines both called *Shangri-La*. Renlangge is now thinking of converting his *Shangri-La* magazine into a plurilingual literary magazine which includes pieces of literature in Chinese, Tibetan and English. (See interview with Shi Yi, Shangri-La, 14/09/2002; and Relangge, Shangri-La, 15/09/2002.)

Corpse;[51] Gter ma Tshe ring chos ’phel (b.1952, better known as Qi Jixian 祁继先), a well-known translator from Shangri-La who is now working in Beijing, and whose translations include *Ngar lcags ni ji ltar bzhus pa yin* (*How the Steel was Tempered*),[52] a Tibetan version of Nikolai Ostrovski’s two-volumes socialist novel published in Moscow in 1952, and *Mi yul gyi dag pa’i zhing khams* (*Lost Horizon*) a Tibetan version of James Hilton’s novel.[53]

Tibetan sinophone writers are much more numerous than tibetophone writers in Bde chen TAP, and more engaged in creative literature. Yi Yan 艺言—in an article published in a special issue of *Open Country* magazine celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the creation of Bde chen TAP, and the fifteenth anniversary of the creation of the Bde chen TAP Federation of Arts and Literature[54]—mentions some forty-seven Tibetan sinophone writers from Bde chen TAP, including seven women writers. Only few of them, however, are regular writers. A large majority—such as, Zeren Wangdui 泽仁旺堆 (Tib. Tshe ring dbang ’dus)[55] and Gesang Langjie 格桑郎杰 (Tib. Skal bzang rnam rgyal)[56]—used to publish pieces of literature in local periodicals in the 1980s, but have now abandoned literary creation. Other writers, such as the Muslim Tibetan Hai Zhigao 海志高 (also known as Mo Suo),[57] have abandoned modern

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51 See Wang and He 1999.

52 See Gter ma 2000. For an English translation, see Ostrovski 1952.

53 See Gter ma 2002.

54 See Yi 1997.

55 Zeren Wangdui (Tshe ring dbang ’dus): born in Deqin county in 1963, he started writing poetry in 1985. He now works at the Deqin County Planning Committee (Deqin xian jihua weiyuanhui). His poems are mainly published in *Open Country* magazine and *Bde chen News*. See, for example: *Yuanye* 1985(4), 1988(3), 1993(3); and *Diqing bao* 15/07/1991, 15/11/1991, 10/01/1992, etc.

56 Gesang Langjie (Skal bzang rnam rgyal): born in Deqin county in 1965, he started writing poetry in 1980. He is now the chief manager of the Deqin County Bureau of Agriculture and Husbandry (Deqin xian nong mu ju). His poems are mainly published in *Open Country* magazine and *Bde chen News*. See, for example: *Yuanye* 1988(special), 1993(2); and *Diqing bao* 15/10/1990, 15/06/1991, 31/01/1992, etc.

57 Hai Zhigao: born in a Deqin county Muslim Tibetan family in 1968, he started writing poetry and songs (texts and music) in the 1980s. His publications are rare, his works have circulated among friend as manuscripts. After his conversion into Tibetan Buddhism, he has completely abandoned modern writing, and has started

poetic creation after converting to Tibetan Buddhism. He has now totally invested in the practice of religion and the translation of Tibetan religious writings into Chinese. Zhaxi Nima 扎西尼玛 (Tib. Bkra shis nyi ma),[58] on the contrary, has only recently won some renown on the Yunnan provincial level with the publication of a poem in the Kunming magazine *Frontiers Arts and Literature* (*Bianjiang wenyi* 边疆文艺). A Yonghong 阿永宏 (better known as Luobo 洛波, Tib. Nor bu)[59] is an other emergent young modernist poet from Bde chen TAP. He is particularly appreciated by the youngest generation of Bde chen TAP students and intellectuals because of his innovative style which recalls Chinese poets such as Haizi 海子, and Western writers such as F. Kafka and A. de Saint-Exupery. Nor bu belongs to no literary official structure in Bde chen TAP. He publishes his poems mainly on the Web to avoid all censure and reach the largest possible readership.

But the most successful and productive Tibetan sinophone writers from Bde chen TAP are Zhala Duji 查拉独几 (Tib. Dgra lha rdo rje) and Abu Sinan 阿布司南 (Tib. A bu sren gnam). Dgra lha rdo rje (b.1950)—a prose writer from Weixi Lisu County who now lives in Shangri-La—is possibly the only Tibetan writer from Weixi who has come to prominence on local and national levels. Dgra lha rdo rje graduated in Chinese traditional medicine in 1976. Since the, he has changed several jobs to earn his living while keeping some freedom from all institutions. He has been a doctor, teacher, policeman, and he even joined the army in the 2nd Sino-Vietnamese war of 1984

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improving his knowledge of the Tibetan language and literature. He is now translating *Byang chub sems ba'i lhung ba bshags pa'i tikaka mthong ba don ldan* into Chinese. He is a professional car driver.

[58] Zhaxi Nima (Bkra shis nyi ma): born in Mingyong (Deqin County) in 1970, he was educated in both Tibetan and Chinese but he writes only in Chinese. He started writing poetry in the early 1990s. He works at the Deqin County Tourist Bureau (Deqin xian luyou ju). His poems are mainly published in *Open Country* magazine and *Bde chen News*. See, for example: *Yuanye* 1999(4); and *Diqing bao* 10/01/1992, 14/02/1992, etc.

[59] A Yonghong (better known as Luobo): born in Deqin County in 1975, he started writing poetry at the age of 13. He now works in the administration of Shangri-La Hospital. His poems are published on the Web, mainly on the well-known literary Web site called *Under the Banyan-Tree* (Ch. *Rongshu xia*) established in Shanghai in July 1999. See http://www.rongshuxia.com.

where he was seriously wounded. Dgra lha rdo rje published his first piece of literature in 1982, when his novel ‘The First Snow’ (Ch. Chu xue 初雪),[60] appeared in the 11th issue of 1982 of *Frontiers Arts and Literature* (*Bianjiang wenyi*), and was awarded the ‘Literary Prize of the Five Tibetan Provinces’ in Chengdu in 1985. Since the early 1980s, Dgra lha rdo rje has been a very enthusiast literary actor: in Weixi, he created the ‘Earthworms Literary Society’ (Qiuyin wenxue she 蚯蚓文学社), and issued an unofficial irregular mimeographed literary magazine called *Earthworms* (*Qiuyin* 蚯蚓) which disappeared when Dgra lha moved to Shangri-La in the late 1980s. In Shangri-La, he has been one of the most unconditional opponent of Yang Sen’s literary and editorial policy, and highly supported the creation of the literary supplement of *Bde chen News* as a literary alternative to *Open Country* magazine in Bde chen TAP. Dgra lha has been a prolific author and was awarded several literary prizes on provincial and national levels. Among his most important publications, one finds: *Bows and Arrows in the Depths of a Thick Forest* (*Milin shenchu de gongjian* 密林深处的弓箭),[61] a script for a TV serial in three parts which stages Hengzhabeng 恒乍绷, the 19th century national hero of the Lisu nationality who fought against the Chinese and who has been very popular in Weixi county; *Please, Have This Cup of Barley-Wine* (*Qing he zhe wan qingkejiu* 请喝这碗青稞酒),[62] a collection of thirteen essays on Bde chen TAP topical subjects; and *Snow Land Scenery* (*Xueyu fengjingxian* 雪域风景线),[63] a collection of 21 selected short stories which have marked Dgra lha rdo rje’s literary career until 1997. Dgra lha rdo rje’s texts (fiction and essays) mainly reflect the multinational context and the cultural hybridity of his native village in Weixi, and of Bde chen TAP, in general.[64] Dgra lha’s style is simple, straightforward, lively, and full of self-derision and irony.

[60] See Zhala 1997: 89–107.

[61] See Zhala 1994.

[62] See Zhala 1996.

[63] See Zhala 1997.

[64] Dgra lha’s novel ‘Public Praise’ (Ch. Koubei), for example, opens as follows: “In Jibudun, Chinese and Tibetans live together. […] But I cannot sort out Chinese from Tibetans: everybody can speak some fluent Tibetan, and everybody can speak some fluent Chinese. […] Chinese lack the Chinese touch, Tibetans lack the Tibetan

A bu sren gnam (b.1966, also called Zhang Dehua 张德华) is an eclectic and prolific writer from Deqin County who now works at the Deqin County Research Bureau of Culture and History (Wenshi bu 文史 部). He is an ancient soldier, and spent eight years in the army where he began his literary career. In 1984, he participated to the 2nd Sino-Vietnamese War, in 1987 he graduated from the Kunming Ground Force Academy where he specialised in literature. He was then appointed to the editorial board of *Southern Frontier Great Wall* (*Nan jiang Changcheng* 南疆长城), a weekly issued by the Yunnanese Army.[65] A bu sren gnam published his first text (a short poem in *Open Country* magazine) in 1983, but only in 1986 he started regularly publish his writings, and in 1988 he decided to seriously consecrate to literary creation. His early works—which were mainly published in Army magazines such as *PLA Arts and Literature* (*Jiefangjun wenyi* 解放军文艺), *War Flag News* (*Zhanqi bao* 战旗报), *Southwestern Military Literature* (*Xi'nan junshi wen-xue* 西南军事文学),[66] etc.—often dealt with personal meditations on military life.[67] Since the 1990s, he has become a prominent figure of the Bde chen TAP Tibetan literary community, mainly thanks to the publication of a group of five poems entitled *Gold* (*Jin* 金), *Wood* (*Mu* 木), *Water* (*Shui* 水), *Fire* (*Huo* 火), *Earth* (*Tu* 土),[68] and the publication of some texts in the Lhasa literary magazine *Tibetan Literature* (*Xizang wenxue* 西藏文学).[69] Since the 1990s, A bu sren gnam literary conception has undergone important changes. The search for Beauty has become his only source of inspiration, a position which he shares with Tibetan writers such as Wei Se (Tib.

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touch" (see Diqing zhou wenlian 1991:1). Dgra lha's essay "Threshing Ground Memories" (Ch. Daguchang de huiyi) opens as follows: "Yes, there are also Tibetans who eat rice, such as the people from Mogong village. This is why my childhood memories are very poor in butter tea taste, and very rich in threshing ground evocations" (see Diqing zhou wenlian 1991: 277).

65 The late *Southern Frontier Great Wall* (*Nan jiang changcheng*) is now called *The Day Before Yesterday News* (*Qianri bao*).

66 See Abu 1986a, Abu 1986c, Abu 1987.

67 See Abu 1986b, Abu 1986d, Abu 1987.

68 See Abu 1997.

69 See, for example, Abu 2002.

’Od zer)[70] and Wangxiu Caidan (Tib. Dbang phyug tshe brtan)[71] with whom he keeps friendly relations and exchange literary meditations. Interesting enough, A bu sren gnam literary maturation has coincided with his first journey to Lhasa in the late 1990s, “an unforgettable experience”, he explained to me.

4. DIQING BAO, BDE CHEN TSHAGS PAR AND THEIR SUPPLEMENTS OF ARTS AND LITERATURE

Diqing bao 迪庆报 (*Bde chen News* in Chinese) was launched in Zhongdian (modern Shangri-La) in 1989, while *Bde chen tshags par* (*Bde chen News* in Tibetan) was created only in 1995 as an internal publication, and under the supervision of the *Diqing bao* editorial board.[72] *Diqing bao* and *Bde chen tshags par* are the first and only newspapers ever published in Bde chen TAP.[73] They are both provided with supplements of arts and literature which are very different in terms of conception, content and objectives. The literary supplement in Chinese was created under the impulse of a large group of Tibetan writers in search for an alternative to *Open Country*

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[70] Wei Se (b.1966, Tib. ’Od zer) is a Lhasa-based Tibetan sinophone woman writer, and an editor of *Tibetan Literature* (*Xizang wenxue*). For more information on Wei Se, see Wei 2001, Maconi forthcoming(b).

[71] Wangxiu Caidan (b.1967, Tib. Dbang phyug tshe brtan) is a Tibetan sinophone poet from A mdo (based in Lanzhou), and an editor of the *Northwestern Nationality Institute Magazine* (*Xibei minyuan bao*). In 2002, he published a collection of poems entitled *Dreamlike Travel* (*Menghuan zhi lu*). See Wangxiu 2002, and Caiwang and Wangxiu 1997.

[72] From now on, by ‘*Diqing bao*’, I mean the Chinese edition of *Bde chen News*, and by ‘*Bde chen tshags par*’, I mean the Tibetan edition of *Bde chen News*. The information given here are based on a personal consultation of the archive of *Bde chen News* (both in Chinese, 1989–2002 issues; and in Tibetan, 1999–2000 issues); Bde chen TAP, September 2002.

[73] In comparison with other minority areas in the PRC which have got newspapers (if not in national language, at least in Chinese) since the first half of the 20th century, official and open newspapers in the Yunnan Tibetan region were created only in the 1980s. In Lijiang, for example, the *Lijiang Vernacular Newspaper* (*Lijiang baihua bao*) in Chinese was launched in 1907. Equally, in Central Tibet, Lian Xiang (the Chinese *amban* in post in Lhasa at the beginning of the 20th c.) created a bilingual Sino-Tibetan newspaper, the *Tibet Vernacular Newspaper* (*Xizang baihua bao*), in Lhasa in 1907.

magazine. It has high literary quality and a large readership. The Tibetan language literary supplement, on the contrary, has a more political genesis, is poorer in content, has a more limited circulation, and a smaller readership. I describe the main features of these two newspapers in the following sections.

4.1. *Diqing bao*

Since the early 1990s, the literary supplement of *Diqing bao* has unofficially superseded *Open Country* magazine in its role as local reference for Tibetan literature written in Chinese in Bde chen TAP. *Diqing bao* has been capable of federating the majority of the Bde chen TAP Tibetan writers, a large readership (it is distributed at a rate of 10,000 issues), and an efficient editorial board.

Bsod nams nor bu, best known under his Chinese name of Yu Degui 俞德贵, has been appointed to the edition of the supplement of arts and literature in *Diqing bao* since 1990.[74] He is now the editor in chief. Educated in Chinese, he graduated from Bde chen Normal School at the beginning of the 1980s where he could study some rudimentary Tibetan. In 1981, he started his literary career as a writer by publishing his first novel in Chinese. In 1985, his short novel *Music Lingering in My Heart* (Yingrao xinling de qinsheng 萦绕心灵的琴声) was awarded the second Tibetan literary prize at the 4th Conference of the Five Tibetan provinces in Chengdu. In the early 1980s, while writing novels and essays, Yu Degui taught himself Tibetan thus acquiring the linguistic competence necessary to work on the collection, classification and translation of Tibetan folk literature. As a member of the Bde chen TAP Federation of Arts and Literature, between 1986 and 1989, he edited six volumes on Bde chen folk literature and culture.[75] In 1990, when Yu Degui started his

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[74] Personal interview with Bsod nams nor bu (Yu Degui), Shangri-La, 16/09/2002.

[75] The six volumes edited and translated by Yu Degui are: *The Heritage of Bde chen Tibetan Folktales* (Diqing zangzu minjian gushi jicheng), *The Heritage of Bde chen Tibetan Folk Ballads* (Diqing zangzu minjian geyao jicheng), *The Heritage of Bde chen Tibetan Folksongs* (Diqing zangzu minjian gequ jicheng), *The Heritage of Bde chen Tibetan Folk Dance* (Diqing zangzu minjian wudao jicheng), *Tibetan Intellectuals in Bde chen* (Diqing zangzu wenhua ren), *The Situation of Tibetans in*

editorial career at *Diqing bao*, and was given the responsibility of the literary supplement, he soon introduced some changes to improve its quality and appeal. Under his impulse, the literary supplement of *Diqing bao* has become a weekly publication (it was before a fortnightly publication), and modern creative literature (instead of folk literature) has been given more consideration.[76] Yu Degui's main objective has been to assure the quality of the literary supplement, and the regularity and seriousness of its publication. He has wished to put an end to favouritism, and to give a chance to skilled young writers. To him, this was possibly the best way of criticising the editorial work made by the editors of *Open Country* magazine in those years.

Many Bde chen Tibetan writers have gathered around the renewed literary enthusiasm of the *Diqing bao* editorial board. In the early 1990s, writers as Rab rgyas dpag sams, Dgra lha rdo rje and A bu sren gnam, etc. have all contributed to the success of "Gangs la me tog", the issue of modern literature in the literary supplement of *Diqing bao*. Some writers, as A bu sren gnam, have been more regular contributors, other, as Rab rgyas dpag sams, have been less constant.[77] But the most regular and successful contributor has been Dgra lha rdo rje, who, since the early 1990s, has been in charge of a column of miscellaneous essays (*zawen* 杂文) in *Diqing bao*, called "One School of Sayings" (Yi jia yan 一家言). Dgra lha rdo rje's talent as an essayist has fully emerged in a series of long essays

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Bde chen (Diqing zangzu qingkuang). Unfortunately, I do not possess a detailed bibliography of these books.

[76] Two literary issues are alternatively published in the literary supplement of *Diqing bao*. "Sounds from *Dpa' bo dpa' mo* Mountain" (Taizi shengyun 太子声韵) consists of Bde chen TAP folk literature and "*Gangs la me tog*" (Gangla Meiduo 岗拉梅多) consists of modern creative literature. Before Yu Degui's appointing to *Diqing bao* editorial board, these two issues were respectively called: 'National culture' (Minzu wenhua) and 'Snow Lotus' (Xuelian).

[77] A bu sren gnam has been in charge of a column of short literary essais and random notes called 'Chatting under the Lantern' (Deng xia mantan). Examples of his essays include: Du Bing Xin (Reading Bing Xin). *Diqing bao* 06/05/1996: 3; and Lingting shige (Listening to poetry). *Diqing bao* 05/12/2001: 3. Rab rgyas dpag sams's contributions in the early 1990s have consisted of long poems such as: Xing de danchen (A Star's Birthday). *Diqing bao* 26/07/1996: 4; and Dongfang de xing (Stars in the East). *Diqing bao* 05/071997: 4.

published under the collective title of "The Hometown of Lingling" (Lingling de guxiang 灵灵的故乡)[78] in the newly created fifth page of *Diqing bao*.[79] Dgra lha's essays consist of personal meditations on topical subjects such as pollution and environmental protection, moral and social behaviours, ignorance and education, etc. They are written in Dgra lha's typical ironical and subtle style which is full of remarkable insights, and very far from the moralistic tones of some PRC socialist literature.

4.2. *Bde chen tshags par*

Bde chen tshags par (that is *Bde chen News* in Tibetan) was launched in 1995 thanks to the support of the editors of *Diqing bao* (in Chinese) who estimated that as a Tibetan TAP, Bde chen TAP should have a Tibetan language newspaper. But because of the large-scale illiteracy in Tibetan in Bde chen TAP, and poor state funding, *Bde chen tshags par* has a limited circulation, contributors are rare, and its publication has become more a political symbolic activity than an cultural enterprise of collective interest. *Bde chen tshags par* is not for sale, and it is distributed for free to 19 local monasteries, to small local Tibetan agglomerations of more than 15 families, to some local bilingual primary and secondary schools, and to state organs which are concerned with Tibetan affairs. *Bde chen tshags par* was initially a monthly publication, but is now edited at the rate of three issues per month, and there is a project to convert it in a weekly publication. The publication of the supplement of arts and literature in *Bde chen tshags par* is very irregular.

The bulk of the literary publications in the supplement of arts and literature of *Bde chen tshags par* consists of literary adaptations of Tibetan folk literature. Contributions of creative modern literature are

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[78] Lingling is the name of a widely-known little monkey of the endangered species of the Yunnan Golden Monkeys (Rinopithecus bieti; Ch. *Dian Jinsi hou*) who live in the forests of the Yunnan Tibetan plateau. Lingling was the official mascot at the International Horticulture Fair held in Kunming in 1991. For an example of Dgra lha rdo rje's essays in *Diqing bao* see: Zhala 2002.

[79] Since 2000, a new fifth page entitled "Shangri-La Weekly of Tourism and Culture" (Xianggelila lüyou wenhua zhoukan) has been added to the Friday issue of *Diqing bao* (which average format consists of three pages of information and a weekly supplementary fourth page of arts and literature).

less frequent. The editor responsible for the edition of the literary supplement of *Bde chen tshags par* is Bsod nams nor-bu (Ch. Yu Degui 俞德贵) who is also the editor in chief of *Diqing bao* in Chinese. Concretely, however, it is Bkra shis don grub (Ch. Bai Yuxian 白玉先) and Byang pa tshe dbang (Ch. Li Xiangyong 李向勇) who are in charge of the edition of the Tibetan literary supplement. Bsod nams nor bu, Bkra shes don 'grub and Byang pa tshe dbang are not only the editors, but also regular contributors to the literary supplement of *Bde chen tshags par*.[80] Other more irregular contributors are Tshe ring dbang 'dus (Ch. Wang Xiaosong 王晓松), and Gter ma Tshe ring chos 'phel (Ch. Qi Jixian 祁继先) whose Tibetan translation of *Lost Horizon* was first published by instalment in the literary supplement of *Bde chen tshags par* throughout 2000.[81]

The few contributors to *Bde chen tshags par* are all perfectly bilingual, and they are generally more engaged on Chinese language literary projects than on Tibetan language literary writing. Bkra shis don grub is the exception,[82] and to him, the improvement of the low status of Tibetan in Bde chen TAP is a priority. Besides helping with the issuing of *Bde chen tshags par*, Bkra shis don grub is a Tibetan language teacher at Bde chen Normal School. He is well-known for his good mastering of the Tibetan language (that is of all the main Tibetan dialects), and he personally knows the diverse worlds of Tibetan literature in other PRC provinces. As a child, due to the poor level of education in Tibetan language in Yunnan, he was sent to school in 'Ba' thang (Sichuan). He then spent two years in Qinghai where he specialised in Tibetan at the Qinghai Institute of Education (Qinghai jiaoyu xueyuan). Here, in 1991, he published his first poem, "Flowers in the Heart" (*Sems nang gi me tog*),[83] in the prestigious

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[80] Their contributions consist of literary translations, and adaptations of folk literature (Bsod nams), adapted moral tales (*gtam bshad*) and poems (Bkra shis), short essays (Byang pa). See, for example, Bkra shis don 'grub 1999.

[81] See Gter ma 2002.

[82] According to the editors of *Bde chen tshags par*, at the beginning of *Bde chen tshags par*, a lama from Bde chen used to send his manuscripts (mainly essays on religion) for contribution. Unfortunately, I could not have access to the texts of this lama.

[83] See Bkra shis don grub 1991.

Tibetan magazine *Sbrang char*. Subsequently, he decided to go back to his hometown “to put his knowledge in the Tibetan language at the service of his people”.[84] In August 2002, Bkra shis don grub represented the *Bde chen tshags par* editorial board at the Meeting of Cooperation Among the thirteen Tibetan Language Newspapers of the Five Tibetan Provinces held in Hezuo (Gannan). This was an important meeting for the preservation of the Tibetan language in the PRC and the cooperation among the multiple poles of the Tibetan language world of culture in the PRC.

5. BDE CHEN TAP TIBETAN LITERATURE *VIS-À-VIS* PRC TIBETAN LITERATURE

The world of Tibetan literature in the PRC consists of a multipolar configuration where the dispersion of diverse gravitational centres (Lhasa, Chab cha, Hezuo, Kangding, Bar khams, Bde chen, etc.) reflects both Tibetan traditional regional divisions, and more recently-implemented administrative partitions. I show elsewhere[85] that the Tibetan literary multipolarity in the PRC does not only mean the decentralisation of literary activities, but is synonymous with limited inter-Tibetan literary communication and exchanges. Tibetan contemporary literature multipolarity has often meant little trans-provincial collaboration and cohesion. This is all the more true for Yunnan Tibetan literature.

Possibly because of the historical marginality of the Yunnan Tibetan region, its sparser Tibetan population, and its less dynamic evolution in the field of contemporary literature, Yunnan Tibetan contemporary literature has suffered from virtual isolation from the rest of the PRC Tibetan literary communities. Non-Yunnan Tibetan writers from Central Tibet, Khams and A mdo, for instance, hardly know the names of their colleagues in Yunnan, and ignore their literary activities. Critical articles on Tibetan literature often neglect Yunnan Tibetan writers, and when they are mentioned, they are referred to as the ‘little brothers’ of Tibetan writers from Lhasa, A

[84] Interview with Bkra shis don grub, Shangri-La, September 2002.
[85] See Maconi forthcoming.

mdo and other Khams regions, these latter being the ‘big brothers’.[86] Generally speaking, works by Yunnan Tibetan writers seldom appear in Lhasa and A mdo Tibetan literary magazines, and, conversely, non-Yunnan Tibetan writers have marginally published in Bde chen TAP periodicals. A bu sren gnam (a writer from Bde chen county whose recent texts appeared in Xizang wenxue in Lhasa),[87] and Yi dam tshe ring (a poet from A mdo who published a few poems in the Shangri-La Open Country Magazine)[88] are the exceptions.

In spite of the general isolation of the Yunnanese Tibetan literature *vis-à-vis* other Tibetan literary circles in the PRC, Yunnan Tibetan writers have always participated to literary activities and projects which have specifically focused on inter-Tibetan literary unity. This is the case for the ‘Meetings of Tibetan literature from the Five Provinces’ which took place in diverse Tibetan towns throughout the 1980s, and which were attended by representatives from every Tibetan region in the PRC (Yunnan included).[89] The fifth of these meetings took place in Kunming in 1988, and was followed by an excursion in Bde chen TAP. Other inter-Tibetan federating literary/editorial activities which saw the participation of Yunnan Tibetan writers, consisted of sinophone publications such as: Selected Works by Outstanding PRC Tibetan Contemporary Writers[90] (which includes two short stories by Dgra lha rdo rje), and Selected Poems by Tibetan Contemporary Poets (which includes poems by A bu sren gnam and Pad ma).[91] More recent collections of Tibetan literature, such as the four-volume Collection of Texts from

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[86] It is interesting to note here that when speaking about Yunnan Tibetan writers, non-Yunnan Tibetan writers use the same rhetoric which is usually used in the PRC to designate the national minorities *vis-à-vis* the Han nationality.

[87] See, for instance, *Xizang wenxue* 2002(4), 2002(6).

[88] See, for instance, *Yuanye* 1988(2): 45–48.

[89] The ‘Meetings of Tibetan Literature from the Five Provinces’ were 6 in total, and took place in Xining (1981), Lhasa (1982), Lanzhou (1983), Chengdu (1985), Kunming (1988), Xining (1994). They were subsequently abandoned because of the PRC central government restriction on Tibetan trans-provincial cultural activities.

[90] *Selected Works by Outstanding PRC Tibetan Contemporary Writers*: Ch. *Zhongguo dangdai zangzu zuojia youxiu zuopin xuan* (see Xue 1991).

[91] *Selected Poems by Tibetan Contemporary Poets*: Ch. *Zangzu dangdai shiren shi xuan*. (See Caiwang and Wangxiu 1997)

the Tibetan Land of Ma ni,[92] which gives priority to literary quality rather than political concerns, do not include Tibetan writers from Bde chen. Tibetophone collections in Tibetan contemporary literature (which are quite numerous) do not include writers from Bde chen too, because, as I explained above, Tibetan language literary production is virtually insignificant in Bde chen TAP.[93]

6. BDE CHEN TIBETAN LITERATURE *VIS-À-VIS* YUNNAN MULTINATIONAL LITERATURE

Yunnan province is the most multinational province in the PRC. Besides the local Han population, Yunnan province is inhabited by several other nationalities such as the Yi, Bai, Tai, Nakhi, Lisu, Pumi, etc. Tibetans, demographically, are a minority in Yunnan, and their demographic status of 'minority among the minorities' has contributed to determine their marginal influence on provincial politics and culture. The Tibetan sphere of activity and influence in Yunnan has remained limited to Bde chen TAP.

Considering literature, for instance, a quick glance to Yunnan literary and editorial activities shows that Tibetans are virtually absent from the literary scene on a provincial level. Nakhi, Yi, Tai, Bai, etc. writers and pieces of literature regularly appear in provincial literary magazines such as *Frontiers Literature* (*Bianjiang wenxue* 边疆文学), *Dianchi Lake* (*Dianchi* 滇池), *Camellia* (*Shancha* 山茶), *Nationalities Culture* (*Minzu wenhua* 民族文化), and *The Journal of Yunnan Nationalities* (*Yunnan minzu bao* 云南民族报), etc. But works by Tibetan writers from Bde chen are seldom published in those magazines. Several members of the editorial board of *Frontiers Literature* (which is the literary magazine of the Yunnan Federation of Arts and Literature), for instance, as well as many active intellectuals who have been appointed to provincial-level literary

[92] *Collection of Texts from the Tibetan Land of* Ma ni: Ch. *Mani shi zangdi wen cong* (see Se 2002).

[93] I pointed out earlier in this article the importance of Bkra shis don grub (the editor of *Bde chen tshags par*) in developing literary relationship between Bde chen TAP and other more successful tibetophone literary communities in the PRC.

responsibilities are of minority extraction. But Bde chen Tibetans are only marginally engaged on literary activities on a provincial level.

Considering the Yunnan publishing industry, we know that since the beginning of the reform period in the early 1980s, and throughout the 1990s, the Chinese central government has granted financial support to Yunnan as a border province with an underdeveloped economy. Part of these funds is still earmarked for nationalities culture and educational publishing. Due to its multinational context, Yunnan publishers have generally largely invested in publications in the traditions, cultures, histories, and folklore of local nationalities. Yunnan Tibetan culture, however, has become only a marginal field of investment for Yunnan publishers, no matter how profitable Tibet-related issues have become in the last decades in the PRC. This is all the more true if one considers the less folklorist, but more creative and modern local Tibetan cultural activities, such as Tibetan creative literature, for instance. Yunnan publications in Tibetan language are particularly rare too. The following description of some relevant Yunnan publications in Tibetan culture (both in Tibetan and Chinese) shows Yunnan main editorial trends in Tibetan literature.[94]

Let us first consider Yunnan publications in Tibetan language between 1949 and 2002. The first Yunnan publication in Tibetan consisted of a two-volume *Concise Tibetan Grammar*[95] issued in 1987 and 1988 by the Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House (Yunnan minzu chubanshe). Thereafter, in the literary field, we find a few collections of Bde chen Tibetan folk literature,[96] and one book of Tibetan classical literature.[97] We also find a novel by Reb gong Rdo rje mkhar,[98] a contemporary Tibetan writer from A mdo, which has remained the only Yunnan publication in tibetophone contemporary literature so far. As far as Tibetan language translations (all from Chinese) published in Yunnan is concerned, besides *Lost Horizon*,[99] we find 'educational' books like *The Story of Lei Feng, The Good*

[94] The following data on Yunnan publications in Tibetan culture between 1949 and 2002 are based on Ma 1995, 1997, 2001, and on several literary sources personally collected during fieldwork in Yunnan in 2002.

[95] See Hu 1987–1988.

[96] See Wang 1989, Tshe ring nyi ma and Bsod nams nor bu 1991, Qi *et al*. 1993.

[97] See Karma 1998.

[98] See Reb gong 1996.

[99] See Gter ma 2002.

Son of Labouring People,[100] for example. Bilingual publications (Tibetan/Chinese) edited in Yunnan include a bilingual annotated version of *Stories Told by the Corpse*,[101] and a bilingual collection of short religious texts (mainly prayers) which Rin chen rdo rje (the editor of this book and a doctor in Shangri-La) saved from destruction during the Cultural Revolution.[102] Some of those texts are attributed to the second and the third Black Hat Karma pa (Karma Pag shi, 1206–1283; and Rang byung rdo rje, 1284–1339) who wrote guidebooks and travel accounts when going on pilgrimage to Kha ba dkar po.[103]

Compared to Tibetan language publications, sinophone publications in Tibetan culture by Yunnan publishers (such as the Yunnan People Publishing House; Ch. Yunnan renmin chubanshe) are generally more numerous, and of better quality (in terms of content, graphic display, paper quality, etc.). Yunnan publications in Tibetan sinophone contemporary literature, however, are rare, especially if one considers works written by Yunnan Tibetan writers. Between 1949 and 2002, the Yunnan People Publishing House has issued but three books by local Tibetan writers: Rab rgyas dpag sams's *Paraffin Candles* (*Shi zhu* 石烛),[104] Yang Zengshi's *Sgrol ma Lake* (*Zhuoma hu*),[105] and Dgra lha rdo rje's *Snow Land Scenery* (*Xueyu fengjingxian* 雪域风景线).[106] On a prefectural level in Shangri-La, the Bde chen TAP Federation of Arts and Literature, between 1989 and 1995, has issued a six-volume collection (four volumes of prose, and two volumes of poetry) of selected works by Bde chen contemporary sinophone writers (Tibetans and other nationalities).[107] But this collection was published for internal distribution, was not for sale, and it had a limited circulation. It has

[100] See Zhang and Gter ma 1992.

[101] See Wang and He 1999.

[102] See Rin chen rdo rje and Gter ma tshe ring chos 'phel 1999.

[103] According to the 'Introduction' to Rin chen rdo rje and Gter ma 1999, the 2nd Zhwa nag Karma pa Karma Pag shi wrote *Rong btsan Kha ba dkar po'i gnas bstod bzhugs so*, and the 3rd Zhwa nag Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje wrote *Gnas mchog Kha ba dkar po'i bsang yig dngos grub char 'bebs bzhugs so*.

[104] See Raojie 1982. This is a collection of poems.

[105] See Yang 1994. This is a collection of short stories.

[106] See Zhala 1997. This is a collection of short stories.

[107] See Diqing zhou wenlian 1989, 1991, 1993, 1995.

only very marginally contributed to the spread of Bde chen TAP literary activities over Yunnan province and China in general.

The Yunnan People Publishing House's more successful publications in so-called 'Tibetan' literature include two multi-volume collections of works related to Tibet, by writers of diverse nationalities. The first collection entitled *Listening to Tibet* (*Lingting Xizang* 聆听西藏),[108] was published in 1999. It consists of four volumes of selected pieces of literature (short novels, poems, essays, and reportage) by writers who have spent some time in Central Tibet, whose literary career is somehow related to Tibet, and whose literary works deal with Tibet. Included in this collection are works by Tibetan sinophone writers such as Zhaxi Dawa, Alai, Wei Se, Yang Zhen, etc., but also by famous Chinese writers such as Ma Yuan, Wang Meng, Haizi, and others.

A second well-publicised Yunnan editorial initiative related to Tibet was launched by the Yunnan People Publishing House in summer 1999 under the title of "*Entering Tibet* Cultural Exploration Event" ("Zoujin Xizang" *wenhua kaocha huodong* 走进西藏文化考察活动). Seven writers of different nationalities (among them there were two Tibetans: Zhaxi Dawa and Alai) were sponsored to go to Lhasa overland via seven different routes, in three months. Subsequently, they had to write a travelogue on their 'exploratory' experience. Some of those writers, such as Long Dong who travelled from Urumqi to Lhasa via mNga' ris, travelled by horse, others, such as Zhaxi Dawa, were driving a car across Byang thang from Lhasa to 'Bum bu. This adventurous editorial initiative resulted in an eight-volume collection, published in 2000, which includes seven travel accounts and an album of photos taken by the participants on their way to Lhasa.[109]

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[108] See Long 1998–1999.

[109] See "Zoujin Xizang" *wenhua kaocha huodong xiangmu zu* 2000. Each of the eight volumes has been conceived as an independent work. See Zhang 2000; Zhaxi 2000; Alai 2000; Long 2000; Jiang 2000; Zeng 2000; Peng 2000; Fan 2000.

7. *From Shangri-La to Cyber-La:*[110] *Closing Remarks*

Agency and *locality* have been the two major concerns underlying this comparative ethno-literary approach to Tibetan contemporary literature in Bde chen TAP. The 'local', as I understand it here, is neither autonomous nor timeless, but is shaped by a concatenations of interacting historical, political, economical and cultural forces, on the national and regional levels. Contemporary literature in Bde chen TAP has essentially been built into the politico-economic forces negotiating the transformation of the frontier Bde chen region into a multinational socialist microcosm, and, subsequently, into the tourist mecca of Shangri-La. This paper builds on earlier personal researches in Tibetan contemporary literature in several Tibetan regions in the PRC. The aim is to illustrate the evolution and scope of Tibetan literary activities in the frontier region of Yunnan Bde chen TAP, mainly between 1950 and 2002, in terms of their local meaning, their significance *vis-à-vis* both the PRC Tibetan and Chinese literary contexts. This paper highlights some of the specificities of the Tibetan literary world in present day Bde chen TAP, that is: the local overfocusing on tourist/economic concerns which asphyxiates all local literary enterprise; the marginality of the Tibetan language and the insignificance of tibetophone literary activities; the fragility of the local literary infrastructure; the overfocusing on the 'local specificities' of literature which hinder a richer and more open literary life; the multilayered isolation of the Bde chen Tibetan literary world *vis-à-vis* both the PRC Tibetan world of contemporary literature, and the Yunnan miltinational literary environment. Several factors which I have described in this paper, indicate that Tibetan literature in Bde chen TAP, as a whole, has lacked the support, confidence and dynamism which would help it to develop and flourish. Nevertheless, the literary evolution of some writers, including Dgra lha rdo rje, A bu sren gnam, and the young Nor bu, for example, deserve more close consideration, and their still genuine enthusiasm for literature needs some encouragement. After all, the large-scale advent of more sophisticated technological means for publishing and distributing literature, such as the world wide web,

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[110] I borrow this expression from Bishop 1997: 61.

have already started to compensate the general fragility of the obsolete literary system in Bde chen TAP. To the young generations of Tibetan aspirant writers in Bde chen TAP, questions of literary isolation, non-communication, marginalisation, and so on, have become trivial concerns. The trans-frontier open space of ‘Cyber-La’ offers them possibilities of expression and exchange which stretch far beyond the Shangri-La mirage. The success of Nor bu’s poems published on the well-known Shanghai-based literary Web site called *Under the Banyan-Tree* (Ch. Rongshu xia 榕树下),[111] is but an example of this. Much more can be found about the evolution and perspectives of Tibetan literary activities on the Web, but this paper represents no more than an initial step in the study of the Tibetan world of literature in Bde chen TAP and only serves to highlight how much work still remains to be done.

[111] See http://www.rongshuxia.com.

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THREE MONGOLIAN-TIBETAN AUTHORS

Tsering Dhondup

In this paper, I would like to give a brief overview of literary production in Tibetan by Mongolians in Henan County. Henan County lies in the southeast part of Qinghai Province, China. The original inhabitants of Henan County were Qoshot Mongolians, but nowadays the county has basically been integrated into Tibetan culture. In 1954, the Henan Mongolian Autonomous County was established.

In 2002, there were ten ethnic groups in Henan County, including the Mongolian, the Tibetan, the Han, the Tu, etc. The total population was 30,100, 93.4% of which were Mongolians, or 28,113 in number. Today, for historical, environmental, and other reasons, only a small number of people can speak Mongolian. Instead, Tibetan is commonly used, while Chinese is the official language. At the present time, only authors in Henan County can be representative of Mongolian literature in Tibetan.

Contemporary Tibetan literature, first represented by Dhondup Gyal, began in the early 1980s. In fact, the writers of Henan were born alongside contemporary Tibetan literature. In those days, several of us interested in literature in Henan County wrote novels and poems as we read Western literature. We would often meet up and talk about literature, as well as girls and wine. We organised an association called the 'Literary Association of Henan County for Amateur'. We bought paper and cut stencils all by ourselves, and ran a literary periodical named Zequ River, publishing works by authors both of Henan County and other places. Some works later became classics in Tibetan literature, such as my novel, *Ralo*. In 1986, Jangbu and I (among others) shot the photographic novel, *What Else Do We Have?* in Lanzhou with an inexpensive camera. Due to poor conditions the novel did not get published, but it was the first photographic novel in Tibetan. It was only sixteen

[1] Translated from the Chinese by Reggie Le (Le Guobin), Yangdon Dhondup and Steven J. Venturino (eds).

years later that photographic novels were introduced as a form of art in the magazine *Sbrang char*'s second issue of the year 2003. Thus, over the past twenty years, authors of Henan County have produced two novels, five novelettes, over 100 short stories, over 1,000 poems, including long poems, nearly 100 prose articles as well as commentaries, travels notes, plays, and reportage. Twenty personal anthologies have been published. Some of the works have been selected by diverse anthologies and Tibetan college textbooks, and some of them have been translated into Mongolian, English, French, Swedish, Italian, Chinese, and other languages, and published either domestically or abroad. Scores of works by four or five of these writers have won literary awards at a provincial level or above, including the Five Provinces Award for Tibetan Literature.

Kunshok kyab, a very influential writer of works such as "On the legal scales" and "Madame Detso", has shifted from literature to politics. Long Zhibo, author of the classic, *Journeys of the Black Horse*, has passed away. Nevertheless, the whole body of literary writers is growing all the time, from five or six people in the beginning to over twenty people at the present time. It is arguably due to mutual influence that there have sprung up so many literary amateurs in Henan County, particularly when you consider that, at the beginning of our writing careers, the poet Jangbu, the translator Gong Baojie (Gongbo ji), who made the Tibetan translation of "Jitan Jiali" (*Gitānjali*), and I all used to teach at Henan County Nationalities Middle School. Under our influence, other people became captivated by literature and began to publish works in their school days. For instance, the poet Nida is both a student of the then Nationalities Middle School and the poet Jangbu's brother, the female poet Dickyi Dolma, is both my student and my relative. There are other factors apart from mutual influence. Firstly, like other grassland peoples, the people of Henan County are broad-minded, extroverted, and fond of cracking jokes with one another. Some jokes come in a long form, full of humour and sidesplitting hyperbole. This is of much help to literary writing, especially in the use of literary language, at least in my opinion. Secondly, grassland children go to school at a late age—normally they go to school at around the age of 10, and I myself went to school at the age of 13. We were able to ride yaks, and during winter and summer vacations we would help our families graze the cattle. Therefore we are all familiar with the life and production on the pastureland.

Works by writers of Henan County are rich in originality and the spirit of exploration, judging either from a social or an artistic perspective, and this occupies an important position in contemporary Tibetan literature, which can be testified to in the Contemporary Tibetan Literary Works series, a select yet comprehensive anthology of Tibetan literary works, including Chinese works by Tibetan writers. The editor-in-chief of this series is Mr Gyurme, who is also the editor-in-chief of *Sbrang char*, a renowned magazine throughout the entire Tibetan-speaking region. This series comprises eight volumes: *Journeys of the Black Horse* includes eighteen novels, three of which are by authors of Henan County; *The Other Side of the River* includes seventeen novels, five of which are by authors of Henan County; *Reunion* includes seventeen novels, three of which are by authors of Henan County; *In the Prime of Life* includes 145 poems, twenty-nine of which are by authors of Henan County; *Snow Soul* includes fifty-seven prose articles, two of which are by authors of Henan County; *A Comprehensive Anthology of Literary Criticism* includes twenty-one works of literary criticism, one of which is by authors of Henan County; *Southerly Winds and The Gold Bracelet*, however, have not included any works by authors of Henan County. At the present time, there are no more than twenty Tibetan novels in the whole Tibetan-speaking region, and two of them are by authors of Henan County. In what follows, I introduce three representative writers of Henan County.

Long Zhibo was born in Meng Banner, Henan County, Qinghai Province, in 1935. He became a monk in his childhood and studied Tibetan at Labrang monastery. He graduated from Northwest Nationalities Institute in 1953, and established himself upon the publication of his novel, *Journeys of the Black Horse*, in 1983. This novel is closest to spoken Amdo dialect and belongs with those that boast the best linguistic beauty to date. Long Zhibo also collected and compiled over ten folk tales, including “Lobsang”, “The mottled dog”, and “Long-drawn spring days”. He died at the age of 50 in Beijing on 16 October 1985. In 1986, Beijing Nationalities Press published his posthumous work *Full Terminologies for Buddhist Studies*. He was a member of Chinese Translators Association, a member of Association for Chinese Minority Nationalities Ancient Literature Research, and a member of Tibetan Buddhist Studies Association.

Jangbu (originally named Dorje Tsering) was born in Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, Qinghai Province, in 1963, and grad-

uated from Northwest Nationalities Institute in 1988. He began to publish novels, poems, prose articles, travel notes, commentaries, translations, reportage, and film plays, covering almost all literary fields, but he first established himself by writing poems. His works are rich in literary techniques, peculiar in style, concise in language, extensive in literary forms, deep in meaning, and thus beyond the comprehension of ordinary readers. Nevertheless, many people diligently examine his works as soon as they are published.

His major works include *Jangbu's Anthology of Poems*, *Jangbu's Anthology of Prose*, and *Collections of Nine-eyed Zi*. His works have been translated into Mongolian, English, French, Chinese, etc., and have won several awards. Jangbu is also one of the few poets in the Tibetan literary world who can write in both Tibetan and Chinese.

Dickyi Dolma was born in Henan County, Qinghai Province, in May 1967, and graduated in 1990 from the department of minority languages, Northwest Nationalities Institute. She has worked as a teacher, secretary, translator, and administrator. She began writing during her junior middle school days, and her debut work, "Lovers in separation" and "Reunion", was published in the magazine *Tibet Literature and Art* in 1987. Dickyi Dolma has written over forty poems and over ten prose works and novels. Some of her poems have been translated into French, German, and other languages. She is the only female poet in Henan County and also one of the few women writers in the whole Tibetan literary world. Her first anthology of poems, *Tears of Poetry*, was published by Hong Kong Tianma Books in 2002, and her second anthology of poems is forthcoming.

I now turn to a brief discussion of my own novel-writing experience. I was born on 13 October 1961. My parents are both herdspeople and pious Buddhists. My father used to be clever and deft. He made ironware during slack pastoral seasons. He thus made a living by making herdspeople's everyday necessities, such as firelocks, knives and swords, and head ornaments. Although my father has never killed a person, he has chanted '*Oṃ māṇi padme hūm*' 100 million times in his old age, as many people have been killed by the firelocks he made. In my childhood, my father's smithy was always packed with people from all walks of life, the stories of whom and by whom have become an inexhaustible source for my novels.

I began to publish novels in Tibetan in 1982, and in order to win a larger readership, I began to publish novels in Chinese in 1990. In 1996,

Tsering Dhondup's *Anthology of Short Stories* was published by Qinghai Nationalities Press; in 1997, Tsering Dhondup's *Anthology of Short Stories* was published by Gansu Nationalities Press; in 2001 the novel "*Ancestor*" was published by Hong Kong Tianma Books, and in 2002, the novel, *Fog*, was published again by Hong Kong Tianma Books. Excerpts of the novel *Howling Gales* (unfinished) appeared in the Tibetan section of the *Qinghai Daily* (20 February 2002).

The critics world considers my works rich in writing techniques, extensive in literary forms, trenchant in wording, sharp in irony, and both witty and penetrating. They also consider me a pioneer in Tibetan mini-stories, diaries, recollection novels, and science fiction. In general, my novels are very popular among readers. Almost all the novels have attracted the attention of critics. The novel *Ralo*, for instance, is the subject of over ten critical articles, which is unusual, given the usual serious lack of reviews in the Tibetan literary world. Comparatively speaking, the following three works can represent my writing style better than others.

The short story, "Disturbance in D village", was originally published in *Sbrang char*'s second issue of the year 1989. I translated it into Chinese and published it in the sixth issue of *Qinghai Lake* in 1990. The story tells of how Sokyab, the village head, under the instructions of *Zhongcang*, a lama and head of the temple, forcefully and relentlessly collects money from the common people for the rebuilding of the temple. Sokyab's message is: "Whichever household does not submit money will be excluded from the village". This results in households that are actually not rich being expelled from the village and then gathering together to form a separate village.

In the end, Sokyab's household actually becomes the only one excluded from the new village. Gradually Sokyab cannot stand this horrible outcome, so he goes to the county government to report on the villagers for excluding him. But the county leaders do not believe him at all, considering him insane, and in the end he really does go insane, crying from morning until evening, "Come back to the village! Whichever household does not come back will be excluded!" At this point, the kind-hearted villagers (but not Zhongcang, the lama) take him back to the village so that he will recover his senses. This is the seemingly ridiculous story. But critics think what is really ridiculous and detestable is the fact that to satisfy their personal religious desires, some religious fanatics who are somehow in power do whatever they

can and lord it over common people in an unscrupulous way. Even more ridiculous are those actually insatiable monks who are always mouthing the platitude that desires are the ultimate source of all evils. Critics also think the short story has the following characteristics: it has told a complete and interesting story concisely; it has produced a vivid personage of a religious fanatic; the real target of censure—Zhongcang the lama—is hidden as a minor character behind the protagonist, etc.

The first half of the novel *Ralo* was published in *Sbrang char*'s first issue of the year 1991 and the whole story was included in Tsering Dhondup's *Anthology of Short Stories*. The composite character of Ralo brings together human polymorphism and complexity. Dignity and feelings of inferiority, pain and numbness, tolerance and selfishness, kind-heartedness and stupidity, and narrow-mindedness and cowardice are all intermingled in this character. His experience ranges from being an illegitimate son to being an orphan, from being a student to being an employee, from being a live-in son-in-law to being a monk, from resuming secular life (twice) to being framed and put in prison, and from being bereft of his wife and children to being fooled, until in the end he leaves the world quietly—he is, indeed, a tragic character. Ralo feels inferior because he has been deprived of his father's love since his childhood. He is born a coward—those who are several years younger than he is have already learned to ride a horse skilfully, while he dare not ride an ox by himself. Other children graduate from primary school after five years of studies, while he has studied for eight years, only to be sent back to the grassland for knocking at the door of a female teacher. He is a devout believer in Buddhism but is framed with the crime of stealing a lama's horse and put in prison. He goes on a pilgrimage to Lhasa, only to end up losing his wife and children.

It was after reading about the character of the 'double' in Russian literature that I wrote *Ralo*, although the critics have different opinions on it. Some people think *Ralo* is an imitation of "The true story of Ah Q", while some other people think Ralo mirrors the naked soul of a Tibetan, that is, all the evil habits of the Tibetan people are embodied in the personage Ralo. Nevertheless, most people think *Ralo* is one of the few classics in contemporary Tibetan literature.

I wrote *Ancestor* (300 pages) in 1989, and it was published in 2001. This novel offers an illustration of the Tibetan pastureland through the vicissitudes of the *Tsezhung* tribe. It depicts in a detailed way how the tribe heads toward extinction as a result of internal conflicts, external

invasions, natural disasters, the destruction of the eco-system, and the impact of modern civilisation, and at the same time describes how the tribespeople go on with their lives and production, how they conduct marriage and funeral rites, how they build temples, how they invoke gods and the Buddha, how they carry out séances and exorcisms, and so on, as these constitute their particular culture. More interestingly, something called an 'ancestor' serves as a thread throughout the novel. Every household has an 'ancestor' that is like a god but not quite, like a person but not quite either, sometimes dead but sometimes living, fond of old things instead of new things, able to eat meals but unable to work, and it limits people's thinking and actions every single minute. Nobody knows his or her relationship with the 'ancestor', but everybody lives in fear of it. In fact, the 'ancestor' signifies the outworn habits and corrupt customs of the Tibetan herdspeople.

From an artistic perspective, this novel combines reality and unreality, mixes the past with the present, and interweaves explicit statements with implicit statements. Upon its publication, the novel aroused great interest among its readers. Several universities focused symposiums on it, and some critics published commentaries. It is currently being translated into Chinese.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE POEM "YOUNG DONDRUP THE COURIER"[1]

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1. A Brief Introduction to the Author of the Poem "Young Dondrup the Courier"

The actual title of this poem is as follows: "[I] sent the letter [that contained] suitable conversation to King of Enlightened Siddhas, the Second Buddsha, Mañjuśrī, through the assigned courier, young Dondrup" (Tib. *Kun mkhyen grub pa'i dbang bo 'Jam mgon sangs rgyas gnyis pa'i sku zhabs su zur gsal ltar gyi zhu 'phrin 'degs pa la ched mngags kyi pho nya ba gzhon nu don rab tu grub pa skabs bab kyi gtam dang bcas pa 'phel*). The author of this poem is Blo bzang dpal 'dan, tutor of the 7th Reb gong skyabs mgon. He was born in the Iron Snake year of the fifteenth *rab byung* (1881) to his mother Sgrol ma and his father Sku dbon chos mdzad of Tsho 'du village, part of the five clans of Rebgong, and named Padma bkra shis. In the Iron Tiger year (1890), at the age of ten, he entered the hermitage Sgis steng Dga' ldan chos 'phel. There he took the vows first of an ordained lay person (Skt. *upāsaka*), then an ordained monk (Skt. *pravrajy*ā), and finally a novice (Skt. *śramaṇera*) from Dge bshes Blo bzang chos grags of Glang gya, and was given the name Blo bzang dpal ldan. In the Iron Rabbit year (1900), he took the vows of a fully ordained monk (*bhikṣu*) from the great boddhisattva Blo bzang chos grags and became a great upholder of the vinaya.

From his youth, he studied with many teachers of scholastics and siddhi, including Zhwa dmar paṇḍita Dge 'dun 'dzin rgya mtsho, Grub dbang 'Jigs med bsam gtan, Tsho 'du yongs 'dzin Byang chub kun spangs blo bzang bstan pa, and Dus zhabs pa chen po Mtsho byung dgyes pa'i dpal ba, and studied in depth the sutras, tantras, and other traditional sciences (*rig gnas*), and became a superlative scholar.

[1] Translated from the Tibetan by Gedun Rabsal.

As a legacy of his becoming a great scholar, he has a vast number of students—such as Reb gong skyabs mgon, Rje ’Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho, great lamas, and other holy persons. As for his writings, he composed commentaries on the sutras, tantras, and other traditional sciences, as well as a great many epistolary poems. He was very active in the ‘three-fold wheel’ of study, meditation and service. He passed away in the Wood Monkey year of the sixteenth *rab byung* (1944).

2. An Analysis of the Relationship Between the Author and the Recipient of the Poem “Young Dondrup the Courier”

The tutor, Blo bzang dpal ldan, when he was sixteen years old, listened to many dharma teachings—including empowerment of the One-Hero Yamantaka (Victor over the *māras*), and preliminary teachings—from the *mahāsiddha* ’Jigs med bsam gtan, the previous reincarnation of ’Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho. From his biography (Skt. *avadāna*) entitled Song of the Miraculous Clouds (*Ngo mtshar sprin gyi sgra dbyangs*):[2]

> At that time, from the depths of endless compassion,
> You manifested in the body of Yamantaka and blessed with vajra-symbols
> The crown of Burning Black Poison Mountain, the Lord of Death;
> And sent [the Lord of Death] as a companion to accomplish all wishes
> When ’Jigs med [*dam chos*], the young sprout of the wish-fulfilling tree,
> Rose with the rains of nectar of good teachings.

Blo bzang dpal ldan received many dharma teachings from [’Jigs med bsam gtan] and gratefully held him as one of his three matchless root lamas. Furthermore, the reincarnation of ’Jigs med bsam gtan, ’Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho, became the best student of the tutor Blo bzang dpal ldan. In this poem, he writes:

> Ten thousand *dpag tshad* to the north from here,
> Is the embodiment of the wisdom of all buddhas [’Jigs med dam chos gya mtsho],
> Who is [as dear to me as] the eyes on my face and the heart inside.
> His name alone is nectar to my ears.

[2] Tib. *de'i tshe tshad med snying rje'i dbyings las srid gsum 'jigs par byed pa'i skur / mngon bzhengs lha chen nyi ma'is sras po dug ri nag po cher 'bar ba'i spyi bor bka rtags rdo rjes byin phab 'jigs med dpag bsam myu gu de / legs bshad bded rtsi'i char gyis skyong tshe bzhed dgusgrub pa'i grogs su sbran /*

This excerpt shows the relationship between the two, in that Blo bzang dpal ldan held 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho as dearly as his own eyes and heart, and greatly respected him.

3. An Analysis of the Composition of "Young Dondrup the Courier", in Terms of its Model and the Author's Motivation

As for the model of this poem, it is the beautiful *Meghadūta*, written by the famous Indian poet, *Kālidāsa*. The subject of the *Meghadūta* concerns a guardian of Kuvera, the god of wealth, the king of the rich, who did not perform well due to his own laziness and thus went against the king's wishes. For this reason he was punished and banished to the mountain of *Rāma*, where he had to stay as a prisoner for one year. During that time, he suffered with great longing for his lover and could not bear this. Since he had no friend to whom he could convey his longing and suffering, he imagined the clouds in the sky as a messenger and in a letter, as if speaking to a person, conveyed his situation, directions, and his greetings to be relayed to his lover.

The poem "Young Dondrup" was composed during Blo bzang dpal ldan's religious retreat at Rdo rje rdzong Monastery in the nomadic upper reaches of Reb gong. Thus, 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho became his best student, and 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho's previous reincarnation, 'Jigs med bsam gtan, was one of his three greatest teachers. Therefore, due to his faith in and longing for 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho, the reincarnation of his lama, he conceived of a *deva*-child from the clouds and made him a messenger. He then sent information about his own situation, directions and greetings to 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho. In the same manner as the *Meghadūta*, he composed the poem as if talking to a human being. However, there are also some differences: while the one poem addresses a lover, here he addresses his lama's reincarnation; while in the one poem the messenger is a cloud, here he is a *deva*-child from the clouds.

4. Analysis Focusing on the Main Characteristics of the Poem "Young Dondrup the Courier"

4.1. *Easy to understand because it is related to the subject*

It is not enough for literary works, such as poems, to simply contain pleasant words and to be mellifluous. Rather, they must also be related to the subject-matter or be rich in meaning. If not, it is like the aphorism of past holy persons: "Even if a lifeless corpse is good, who would pick it up?" Throughout the poem, the author prioritised that it be related to the subject, which clearly shows happiness, sorrow, faith and emotion. There are absolutely no dead words which are empty of meaning. Some examples follow.

In the early fourteenth century, Sa 'dzin Temple was built at Rong bo Monastery, and belonged to the Sa skya sect. Later, in the Iron Horse year of the eleventh *rab byung* (1630), Shar Skal ldan rgya mtsho founded a debate college Thos bsam rnam par rgyal ba'i gling and the monastery was converted to the Dge lugs pa sect. In the Wood Tiger year of the twelfth *rab byung* (1731), Skal ldan Ngag dbang 'phrin las rgya mtsho founded the tantric college Rgyud pa grwa tshang, and in the Water Snake year of the thirteenth *rab byung* (1773), Skal ldan Dge 'dun 'phrin las rab rgyas founded the Kālacakra college, Dus 'khor grwa tshang. The lineage of the Rebgong skyabs mgon was thus sustained and Buddhism flourished. In order to show this [history], the author writes in this poem:

> By the saffron of the good deeds of the lineage of the Rebgong skyabs mgon,
> What they wrote in the sky-mirror clearly shows in 100 traditions
> And is called 'The heart of the earth'
> Its fame remained at the edge of the sky.

In addition, in the 1920s and 30s, Ma Bufang occupied the area of Qinghai and held power through military force. In a horrific manner, he executed without compassion people who disobeyed and in turn rebelled against him. In Rebgong, for example, he attacked Upper Rebgong, as well as Blon che Village. In particular, he attacked and executed people in the village of Ko'u sde in upper Rebgong.

He attacked the Rte'u clan in Hor village, which is part of the nomad area of Rebgong (today called Rtsekhog county). If one speaks of those attacks, the listeners will involuntarily feel fear or compassion.

Among those attacks, to mention just one example here, Ko'u sde Village could not bear the attacks and pressure. With no other option, the village rebelled against him. Ma Bufang sent a huge number of soldiers and ordered the implementation of 'The Three Endings'; namely, to kill the main targets, to burn all of the houses in the village until destroyed, and to seize all valuables at the end. When the army carried out these orders, the Tibetans of Ko'u sde Village, who were upstanding and heroic, with no fear of his force and giving up their own lives, bravely fought back. However, it is a natural law that the weak cannot conquer the strong, the few cannot conquer the many. Ultimately, all of the houses were burned down, all wealth was seized, and many people were killed, women and men alike. According to historical documents, 222 people were beheaded, with no distinction between male or female, old or young, monastic or lay, and their heads were hung on the trees near Rong bo Monastery. For some time, no one could care for the beheaded dead bodies. Dogs and vultures ate the bodies; and it was said that in the night ghosts, owls, etc. freely ate them.

In order to express his deep anger and criticism of this horrible and inhumane behaviour, the author writes in this poem:

> Having cut off the heads, like ears of wheat,
> Of the enemy hordes who confronted them,
> The sound of the demons smacking their lips
> In a sea of blood and fat is the music of the night.

The *mahāsiddha* 'Jigs med bsam gtan was born in the Wood Dog year of the fourteenth *rab byung* (1814). From childhood he became a novitiate of Tibetan Buddhism, and studied the sutras, tantras and other traditional sciences. Because he was the true reincarnation of Rwa Lotsawa, through the practice of the two stages of the Lord of Death—who is the wrathful form of Mañjuśrī—he obtained the state of Vajradhara, that is, the unification of the purified body or the illusory body (*mayakaya*) and the purified mind or *Prabhāsvara mayā*. Then in order to motivate sentient beings who adhere to the view of permanence to turn towards the dharma, he demonstrated his death in the Fire Bird year of the fifteenth *rab byung* (1897). During the cremation of his body wondrous relics appeared on his bones, such as buddha-images,

mudras, and various mantras. With these relics as its heart, a stupa was built at Bkra shis chos gling Monastery in Ka ring Village. In the conventional realm, monks and lay people continuously visited the stupa. In the unconventional realm, bodhisattvas, *āryas* of the Lesser Vehicle—the Hearers (*śrāvakas*) and the Solitary Realisers (*pratyekabuddhas*), and worldy gods such as Brahma and Indra, paid respect to the stupa day and night in order to generate merit. The author describes this event in his poem:

> The Fearless Siddha ['Jigs med bsam gtan], acquired the illusory body,
> And the relics of his old man's body, a container of jewels,
> Captivated every last worldy and transworldly guest,
> Causing embarrassment to other Buddhas.

These three verses mentioned here, the author's entire poem "Young Dondrup", as well as his other poems are rich in content and concern real events. His poems possess many virtues, such as being void of the faults of contradiction and irrelevant subject-matter, and are thus easily accessible to readers.

4.2. *Pleasant-sounding because the words are ornamented*

In general, it is very important for all poems and writings not to be merely rich with content, but rather also to be beautiful and pleasant in expression, which is the art or quality of attracting the minds of others. As stated by early scholars: "The speech which is purely composed by scholars is called the 'wish-fulfilling cow' (*'dod 'jo ba*); if poorly composed, it is the author who is called a cow". Likewise, "Though the king is proud of his youth, when unadorned, people will talk". Accordingly, any poem or literary work will be perfect if adorned with ornamental words (*alaṃkāra*), which is the art of attracting the minds of others. This holy scholar [Sgis steng Blo bzang dpal ldan] paid great attention to composition in every one of his literary works.

For this reason, he is a great expert on poetry. This is mentioned in his biography, which reads as follows:

> In the summer of the Iron Ox year of the fifteenth *rab byung* (1901), he intended to study poetry and invited Master Dus zhabs pa mtsho byung dgyes pa'i dpal ba to his own monastery. Using the textbooks Dbyangs can dgyes glu [Fifth Dalai Lama's commentary on the *Kāvyādarśa*] and Daṇḍin dgongs rgyan [Bod mkhas pa's commentary on the *Kāvyādarśa*],

> he studied the three chapters of the *Kāvyādarśsa* and *Sgra dbyangs rgya mtsho'i 'jug ngogs*, a book which illustrates *kāvya* poetics. He then took his writing examination with this teacher. As a result of his crossing this ocean of the sciences of *Sārasvatī* [i.e. studying *kāvya* poetics], he wrote many and various works of verse and prose. By just reading his poems, it is clear that his works are superior to those of *Kṣemendra* and *Aśvagos*, in India, as well as *Zhang zhung ba Chos dbang grags pa* and *Mkhas grub rje* in Tibet.

From the biography (*avadāna*) Song of the Miraculous Clouds (Ngo mtshar sprin gyi sgra dbyangs):

> The young lover of poetry and compositions
> Has been your friend for many lives.
> Having invited her as a joyous companion into your heart,
> You are brethren with Kṣemendra and Kālidāsa.
> This poem is neither fiction nor praise. It is just speaking the truth.

As stated in his biography, all of these are existing in the manner of truth in his poems. Therefore, it has the qualities of being decorated with word ornaments and pleasant to the ear. The three verses I have quoted can themselves serve as sufficient example. However, if we quote other verses as illustration, it will help us understand this poem in more depth. Thus, a few more excerpts from "Young Dondrup":

> My estate consists of teams of horses and elephants,
> Where hawks can fly around mightily for some eighteen days and nights
> But never see the far borders of my realm.
> It is similar to the palace of Kuvera (Rnam thos sras).
> However, I have forsaken the world.
> Holding a clay pot and wearing saffron robes,
> E-ma! I purposely became a monk who resides in peaceful retreat
> With no attachment.

These two verses show that Yongs 'dzin Blo bzang dpal ldan's birth house was very rich, but seeing the faults of *saṃsāra* he then became a monk. Furthermore, when he discusses his family's power and wealth, including horses and elephants throughout the land, and claims that if a hawk flies for eighteen days and nights it still cannot reach the edge, this is an example of the 22nd ornament of the second chapter of the *Kāvyādarśa*—i.e. 'the extensive ornament' (*rgya che ba'i rgyan*); in particular, the 'ornament of extensive wealth' (*'byor ba rgya che ba'i rgyan*). Because his description of the hawk who can not see the edge of his realm even if flying for eighteen days and nights is greatly exaggerated, it belongs to the category of the 'ornament of beauty' which is

the ninth ornament of the 'unique *alaṃkāra*' (*thun mong ma yin pa'i rgyan*) in the first chapter of the *Kāvyādarśa*; and is the 'ornament of beauty' of the Eastern Indian tradition. When Blo bzang dpal ldan states, "It is similar to the palace of King Kuvera", then he is using an 'ornament of metaphor'.

When he states, "However, I have forsaken the world", he is using 'the ornament of expressing true action' (*bya ba rang bzhin brjod pa'i rgyan*). When he describes himself as "holding a clay pot and wearing saffron robes…with no attachment", this is the 'ornament of expressing true material' (*rdzas rang bzhin brjod pa'i rgyan*). When he states, "E-ma! I purposely became a monk who resides in peaceful retreat", he is using the 18th 'semantic ornament' (*don rgyan*) or the 'ornament possessing *rasa*' (*nyams ldan gyi rgyan*). In this way, his poetry is endowed with excellent taste (Skt. *rasa*), and his composition is made more beautiful.

Let us consider another example from this poem:

> Then [comes] the fort of the lord of land,
> Which may block the sun and moon in their path.
> The heap of weapon on the road, a woman's ear,
> Will impair your heart.

This verse describes the scene one would see if walking down from the market where people of various nationalities gathered with their merchandise. Just beyond the market was the fort of the army of Ma Bufang who governed at that time. When Blo bzang dpal ldan describes how the fort is so high that it might block the path of the sun and moon, he is using the 'ornament of personification' (*rab rtog snyam sgra can*). Like the 'ornament of beauty' of the Eastern Indian tradition, it is greatly exaggerated. Furthermore, when he depicts the street of the ruler's fort in the form of a woman's ear, he is using the 'ornament of form' (*gzugs rgyan*). Through this and by generating the taste or *rasa* of fear when he writes, "The bundles of weapons will harm your heart", the author expresses criticism, whether directly or indirectly, toward the strong force of the bad government.

Likewise, the author writes in this poem:

> At the foot of the valley, amidst a circle of natural mountains,
> A stone pillar that was not constructed (natural) touches the sky.
> The blue sky is cautious for his own body
> And relies on the trickery of concealing his massive form.

This verse shows the reasons behind the naming of Ka ring Village and Ka ring Monastery; that is, at the foot of that valley there is a tall (*ring*) stone pillar (*ka*). In terms of how this is expressed, at the foot of that valley, on the mountain range which the Creator purposely did not make, there is a stone pillar which was not purposely raised. The stone pillar touched the sky. This is the 9th semantic ornament or the 'ornament of possibility' (*srid pa can gyi rgyan*). Likewise, When the pillar reached the depths of the sky, the blue sky drew his heart close to his body, that is he was cautious, and used the deceptive trick of hiding his massive form so that it was not visible. This is the 10th 'unique ornament' described in the first chapter of the *Kāvyādarśa*—the 'ornamentation of single-pointed concentration'. Drawing his heart close to his body and using the deceptive trick of hiding are qualities of beings, but he applied these to the sky and through this he gave his words a beautiful quality.

Furthermore, in this poem he states:

> They meet on occasions with their innate lovers,
> Goddesses with glorious bodies like banana trees,
> Breasts like lotus roots, lips like coral, mouth water like honey,
> Blue hair, their eyes like *utpala* petals.

Rdo rje rdzong Monastery is the abode of Yamantaka, who is the wrathful form of Mañjuśrī. On occasions like the 10th and 30th of each month, enlightened ḍākinīs would gather there and will lay the basis for generating Great Bliss. To show that, bodies like banana trees, breasts like lotus roots, lips like coral, mouth water like honey—all of these words are the abbreviation of many words. Possessing the blue-colored hair is the 'ornament of natural expression'. The eye-like *utpala* petals he applied the ornament of the abbreviation of words (*'bru mang gi tshig sdud kyi rgyan*). Through this he made his composition beautiful. As illustrated above, throughout all of his poems—especially the poem "Young Dondrup the Courier"—he applies word-ornaments (*alaṃkāra*) wherever fitting. We can understand this is an excellent poem which possesses the qualifications of being pleasant to the ear and beautiful to the mind.

4.3. *Easy to read because the lines are well-composed*

Metrics (Tib. *sdeb sbyor*; Skt. *chandra*) in Sanskrit suggest that, for example, the suffix *ta* is light and the central-letter *dza* is heavy. In this way there is a requisite order of heaviness and lightness in *sdeb sbyor* as taught in texts on *sdeb sbyor*. Otherwise, using the always-light *na* instead of the light *ta* suffix, or using the heavy letter *ga* instead of the light letter *la*, will be considered poor composition. Tibetan does not have this order. However, it would be considered a fault if the number of words or the length of the lines in the verse differ. By avoiding this fault, it will be easy to read and also has the quality of being pleasant to the ears. There is absolutely no limit regarding the number of words in each line; you can do as you wish. Previous scholars say that there can be from five to thirty-three syllables.

Moreover, if in the first stanza (*sho lo ka*) each line has seven syllables, then in the next stanza, the lines can have eight, nine, or ten syllables. If each line of the first stanza has thirteen syllables, then you can reduce these to six, seven, nine, and eleven syllables in following stanzas. There is no definite rule. If a previous verse has fewer syllables, later verses may have more syllables. For example, in the first ten stanzas of "Young Dondrup", each line has ten syllables. Then, in the following two stanzas each line has seven syllables. Then the next ten stanzas each line has nine syllables. Another stanza has seven syllables. Another ten stanzas have nine syllables in each line. Except for the last stanza which has 23 syllables he alternates between seven and nine-syllable lines throughout his entire poem.

For any verse—whether it consists of five syllable lines or 33 syllable lines—the positioning of single-syllable and two-syllable words must be consistent for the poem to read beautifully. Otherwise, it is not that beautiful. The term *tsheg bar cha* refers to words in which the two syllables must be read together. The term *tsheg bar ya* refers to single syllable words.

Having said this, it is very important to be consistent in the placing of two-syllable and one-syllable words in any line, regardless of length. For example, in the following seven-syllable lines, there are two two-syllable words and one one-syllable word, followed by another two-syllable word:

nyams dga'i skyed tshal gyi nang na
dwangs gtsang rding bu zhig 'khyil lo
In the joyous garden lies
A pure and clean pond.

Because the placing of two and one-syllable words is consistent in the two lines, it is easy to read and pleasant-sounding. Consider the following verse:

nyams dga'i skyed tshal gyi nang na /
dwangs shing gtang ba'i rding bu yod /

In this verse, the first line consists of two two-syllable words, a one-syllable word, and a two-syllable word. The second line, however, contains of three two-syllable words and one one-syllable word.

For example, in this poem except for the last stanza which has 23-syllable lines, in the alternating of seven-syllable and nine-syllable verse, only the last syllable is a one-syllable word. The other syllables are two-word syllables. Therefore, each line can be read in one breath. If read in this way, it is comfortable to the reader and pleasant to the listeners.

In the last stanza of the poem,

legs bshad smra ba'i lce rtse glog ltar • rnam par 'gyu zhing mgrin pa'i phug dag • rig pa'i dbyangs kyi nga ro 'dzin /
mkhas las mkhas pa'i zur phud la ni • rkang stegs rab 'cha' rna bar sngon med • utpala rgyan byin rtsis dgas khrid /
ma khol dbyangs dang chos dbang grags pa'i • ngag rig gcig tu 'dres pa min nam • nyams kyis 'phags paiI lang tsho 'bar /
dus kyi bsod nams zong gis khugs min • kun mkhyen ji bzhin dpag yas mthu las • smra ba'i nyi ma gcig pur grub /

My tongue with which I pronounce elegant speech races like lightning; and the far reaches of my voice hold the taste of poetic melody.
I placed my foot on the crown of the most excellent scholars, adorned my ear with an unprecedented *utpala* flower, led with the joy of frolic.
Isn't my poem a mixture of that by Kālidāsa and Chos dbang grags pa? Does it not it burn with the vitality which was attained by their *rasa*?
One cannot buy it with the merit of time; just like the Buddha, I became the only Sun of Speech through unbounded strength.

In this stanza, each line has eleven two-syllable words followed by one one-syllable word. You cannot read a whole line in one breath. If forcefully read in one breath, it is uncomfortable and not pleasant to the ear. If you read it by pausing at each caesura, then it is easy to read and

pleasant-sounding. I have written a dot at each caesura. This poem was composed with careful deliberation regarding metrics, as discussed above. It is thus easy to read, because the lines are well-composed.

4.4. *Extraordinary for its use of metaphor (mngon brjod)*

Generally speaking, the term '*mngon brjod*' refers to the science of applying various terms, based on the characteristics of material phenomena: interdependence, similarity, relationship, cause and effect, base and dependence, actions and contradictions. Metrics (*sdeb sbyor*), drama (*zlos gar*), and metaphors (*mngon brjod*) are closely related to poetry (*snyan ngag*). Therefore, some scholars include these three subjects under poetry.

As for how the science of metaphor is related to poetry (*snyan ngag*). It has many positive uses: to meet the required number of syllables, to avoid redundancy, to clearly show qualities of the subject or its action, or for aesthetic purposes. I will demonstrate how this poem illustrates these virtues by quoting a few passages.

In order to meet the required number of syllables:

gsung mnyan sku yi rgyal mtshan blta ba'i slad /
phyogs 'grul snyim pa'i gzong ba rin chen gyis /
phyur bu bkang rnams dbang chen mtshan ma'i ltor /
'jigs sde me ni rgyung chad med la rtog /

For the purpose of listening to his teachings and
for seeing his victorious presence,
Guests from all directions with their cupped hands piled high with jewels,
[arrive] endlessly like the constant flow of the Ganges into the ocean.

In order to see and listen to the Reb gong skyab mgon (Protector), the flow of guests is continuous and from all directions, the hands of the faithful piled with jewels. In this stanza, for example, *dbang chen mtshan ma* is a metaphor for ocean (*rgya mtsho*). Likewise, *'jigs sde me* is a metaphor for the Ganges River. If in these lines he had used 'ocean' or 'Ganges River', instead of their respective metaphors, his lines would have been short by one syllable. Therefore, these metaphors are intentionally used to meet the requisite number of syllables and for aesthetic purposes.

As for avoiding redundancy: Except in the case of poems using 'cycle-ornament' (*skor rgyan*) or 'phonetic ornaments' (*sgra rgyan*),

repeating the same vocabulary is considered a defect or poor composition. Therefore, to avoid this fault in this poem, he writes:

gangs dkar ral ba stug po'i thor cog gi /
rtse mo mkhar bsnyegs nyi zla'i rna che zung /
mgul bar bzung ba'i 'bigs byed ri bo'i spun /
smig rgyu'i ka ba dgung la btsugs pa 'dra /
g.ya' dang rdza yi glegs bum ma 'thor ba'i /
sa 'dzin rtse mo mthongs las mthong dka' ste /
'dab bzang dbang bo bye 'u'i go 'phang la /
'god na 'dab chags phal rnams spre'u'i khyu /

The mountain peak covered with a thick braid of snow touches the sky.
It is kin to the Vindhya Mountain which at its neck
wears the sun and moon as if a pair of earrings.
It is like a mirage-pillar established in the heavens.
Even from the sky, it is difficult to see the peak of the mountain
made of slate, like a stack of pages intact.
Garuda birds are reduced to the rank of baby birds.
Common birds look like a group of monkeys.

In the first stanza, the writer has used the word 'mountain' (*ri bo*). If he were to use this word *ri bo* again in the second stanza, it would not be beautiful. For this reason, he has used the term 'earth-holder' (*sa 'dzin*) and his writing is more aesthetic.

In order to clearly show the qualities of the subject or its action, he has used metaphors along with the stories of Vedas (ancient Hindu stories) in this poem. For example:

de gzhan lho byang don mthun khri phrag gis /
bgrod pa gcig pa'i gzhung lam dar dkar gyi /
khug pa brkyangs pas mi'u thung gom pa yang /
grog ma'i sug pa'i rjes la yang dag rtog /

Instead, there are ten thousand merchants of south and north,
Using the same main path;
Because the path is a white winding banner extending far,
Even truly make Vamana's steps into an ant's footprints.

The story of "*mi'u thung*" (Short Man or Vamana in Sanskrit) is one of the ten emanations of Visnu (*khyab 'jug gi 'jug pa bcu*). Furthermore, a passage from *Khyad par 'phags bstod* reads as follows:

khyab 'jug mi'u thung gzugs bsgyur nas /
g.yo thabs kyis ni stobs ldan bslus /

> The Visnu transformed into Vamana
> Deceived Asura or Bali through tricks.

And in its commentary, 'Words about the Visnu transformed into Vamana', we read: Once upon a time, there is a demon god called Asura. When Asura ruled on the three realms by overpowering others, Visnu thought, I could not make war with him because he has an excellent energy of beings. Therefore, I must deceive him through tricks. He then emanated himself in the form of a short Brahman man and acted as a beggar. When King Asura was practising Horse Worship, he made efforts to chant, "Who, who wants what?" And, "To whom do I give what?" Then the Brahman went toward the king and said, "I am asking you to give a step-measure of ground in order to make worship to the Fire for my parents". Then the King replied, "What will be accomplished by giving just a little ground? You may ask for things like an elephant, a horse, a cart wagon, gold and so on. I do not have any objections on that and also I give to you special ones". But Brahman disagrees with him. Then King says, "If you want it then, you may have even three steps measurement of ground". Then Visnu's two steps covered all three realms and he could not find any ground for his third step. By then the king Asura became depressed and promised to give whatever he pledged to do. He also lost all of his property with great of fear. Visnu arrested him and bounded under ground.

After realising Lord Visnu could cross the three realms in two steps, in this poem, Blo bzang dpal ldan writes:

> There are ten thousand merchants of south and north,
> Using a same main path
> Because the path is a white winding banner extending far.

In order to indicate the long mountain pass Bkra shis la ring which is located near Rdo rje rdzong monastery, he did not say the mountain pass is very hard to cross because it is too long, nor did he say that it may take a long time to cross the mountain pass with a fast horse. However, he described that this mountain pass is too long, and therefore will make Visnu's steps into footprint of an ant. Through this, it provides readers with the imagery of a very long mountain pass.

Likewise, the writer uses many metaphors (*mngon brjod*) where he feels they fit. For example: *g.yon ma* (Woman), *legs bris bu* (*deva*), *sa srung* (elephant), *lus skyes* (epithet of Paracu Rama), *nor rtsen pho*

brang (palace of Kuvera), *nyal 'gro* (river), *dza hu'i bu mo* (Ganges River), *bshul* (journey), *rkang drug* (honey bee), *ri skyes* (goddess Uma), *sa 'dzin* (Mountain), *chom po* (robber), *za byed* (fire), *sngo bsangs* (sky) and *lta byed* (eye). By using many metaphors in his poem, the writer has made it more aesthetically pleasing. Therefore, I describe it as extraordinary for its use of metaphors (*mngon brjod*).

5. The Important role played by the poem "Young Dondrup the Courier" in the development of Tibetan Literature in the 1980s

In the 13th century, *Kāvyādarśa* [*Snyan ngag me long*] was translated into the Tibetan Language, since then it has spread extensively. In addition, it has also developed accordingly in regards to the ten traditional sciences. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Tibetan literature reached its peak in terms of development. This progress is like a tree, which has grown successfully and provided fruits as well. However, during the misfortunes of the Cultural Revolution, all works of Tibetan literature were destroyed.

During the Earth Horse year of the seventh *rab byung* (1978), the 3rd session of Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the 11th of Chinese Communist Party was held, and since then, policies have become more relaxed. As a result, the publishing of the surviving traditional Tibetan books started once again. The Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House published *Rmad du byung ba'i snyan ngag gi tshig rgyan phun sum tshogs pa'i chab shog phyogs bsgrigs*. (The collection of letters [by Blo bzang dpal ldan] that is rich with the excellent poetics of word ornamentation.) The longest poems in the collection are "*Pho nya gzhon nu don rab tu grub pa*" ("Young Dondrup the Courier") and "*Rtogs brjod gser gyi me tog*" (*Avadāna:* "The Golden Flowers").

Additionally, within Tibetan monasteries, and especially amongst the major teachers and students of high schools and colleges, a hot wave of interest in studying this collection of letters [of *Blo bzang dpal ldan*] has developed. Furthermore, many paid particular attention to "*Pho nya gzhon nu don rab tu grub pa*" ("Young Dondrup the Courier") and "*Rtogs brjod gser gyi me tog*" (*Avadāna:* "The Golden Flowers"). Gradually, periodic magazines such as *Sbrang char* and *Mtsho sngon*

slob gso were published, and in these magazines, new writers composed an extensive amount of writings which were based or modeled on this poetry. Therefore, this poem is comparable to a key that has opened the gates of the mind in reference to Tibetan literature in the 1980s. We can conclude, after consideration of the above-mentioned reasoning, that this poem plays an important role in the development of Tibetan Literature in the 1980s.

Conclusion

Firstly, as I mentioned earlier, the author of "Young Dondrup the Courier" is a great scholar who likely outshines many, ranking with the great Indian poets such as *Kṣemendra* and *Aśvagoṣa*. Therefore, this poem possesses many virtues, including deep subject matter and aesthetic words. Secondly, I myself lack knowledge, both innate and learned. Thirdly, the duration of writing this paper is very short. Due to all these factors, I am not able to write a well-defined paper. I wrote this short paper in the manner of 'pointing to the mountain with fingers'. Also in this paper, there are certainly many faults, including mistakes and contradictions. Therefore, placing my hands on my heart, I apologise to straightforward and intelligent persons. In addition, I make a request for corrections. If there exists any virtue, even a drop of water the size of a hair tip, may it be the cause for improvement of the ten traditional sciences which are the precious treasure of the Land of Snows.

CHANGING IDENTITIES: THE CREATION OF 'TIBETAN' LITERARY VOICES IN THE PRC[1]

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At the end of the 1970s, after decades of political isolation, China entered a new era of reforms and open-door policies. On the agenda of Deng Xiaoping's government was revitalising the cultures of China's ethnic minorities, which had suffered heavy damage during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). This included the creation of journals and publishing houses where minority writers could publish works reflecting their own cultures and traditions. Although modern Tibetan literature would flourish from the 1980s on, its beginnings during the late 1970s were very slowly emerging. Partly because of the devastating effects of the Cultural Revolution in Tibet, and partly because of the lack of a secular tradition in Tibetan literature, by the end of the Cultural Revolution it was extremely difficult to find Tibetan writers. A strong belief in Deng Xiaoping's directives, mixed with a sense of Socialist 'civilising' duty and a regret for the damages Chinese politics had inflicted upon Tibetan culture inspired a group of Han editors based in Tibet to actively seek Tibetan intellectuals who could develop a body of modern literature. When some ethnically hybrid intellectuals, who have been previously considered as Han, showed strong literary potential, editors pressed them to write under Tibetan names, so as to serve as role models for new generations of Tibetan intellectuals. This paper explores how two of these writers, Sebo and Tashi Dawa, decided to follow the Chinese editors' lead and embarked on an arduous personal and literary journey in search of their Tibetan identities.

[1] A short version of this paper was presented at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (Washington, DC, April 2002).

1. The Creation of Tibetan Identities

In the late 1970s, after a decade of Han political and cultural assimilation, the rights of China's ethnic minorities re-entered the official discourse. In 1977, following official directives, the Chinese-language journal Literature and Arts from Tibet [*Xizang wenyi*] was created with the only purpose of publishing literature about Tibet. However, the key factor in the revitalisation of Tibetan culture was Hu Yaobang's visit to Tibet in 1980. In his Lhasa speech on May 29th 1980, Hu acknowledged the inadequacy of the Chinese policy regarding Tibet. For the first time, a leader from the People's Republic of China admitted that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was to be blamed for the poor situation of modern Tibet:

> [...] Tibetans still live in poverty. In some areas living standards have even gone down. We comrades in the Central Committee [...] feel that our party has let the Tibetan people down. We feel very bad! The sole purpose of our Communist Party is to work for the happiness of people, to do good things for them. We have worked nearly thirty years, but the life of the Tibetan people has not been notably improved. Are we not to blame?[2]

While during the Cultural Revolution Han cadres in Tibet had been instructed in doing away with local culture in order to promote the homogenising ideas of Communist China, they now were officially told to promote Tibetan culture at all costs. The blooming of a modern Tibetan literature seemed one of the logical steps towards this new goal and, for the most part, Han editors in Tibet confronted this task enthusiastically.[3] After a decade of forced silence, educated people all over China burst into a spontaneous and almost therapeutic writing of literature, known as '*scar literature*' [*shanghen wenxue*], which allowed them the sharing of tragic experiences and the beginning of a collective healing process.[4] Although Han editors in Tibet expected a similar pop-

[2] Quoted in Wang 1994: 287. This is Wang's own translation. In the course of several interviews I conducted in the TAR during Fall 1999, many Tibetan writers, as well as Han authors residing in Tibet, referred to Hu Yaobang's speech as 'honest' and 'deeply moving'.

[3] At the time, most editors in Tibet were Han cadres who had been sent to Lhasa in the 1950s or during the 1970s.

[4] This literary movement is also known in English as 'literature of the wounded'.

ular reaction by Tibetans, initially very few Tibetan writers answered the Chinese literary call.

The shortage of Tibetan intellectuals was due to historical and political reasons. Literacy was not generalised under the old Tibetan regime, and in 1959 most literate Tibetans fled to India. Some others remained in Tibet, joined the CCP and received a Chinese education inside Marxist-Leninist ideological parameters. But with the Cultural Revolution most regular education ceased, and Tibetan culture suffered severe damage under the campaign to eradicate the 'Four Olds': ideas, culture, morals and customs. The publication of literary works by writers of ethnic minority origin plummeted in China during those ten years. The following poem, attributed to a Tibetan writer, is an example of the few pieces of 'literature' allowed during the Cultural Revolution:

> Our steppes are full of precious stones,
> The theory of dictatorship by the proletariat is a gem among gems!
> Soviet revisionists will perish, but my heart will not die.[5]

After 1979, when the political conditions were finally favorable to a Tibetan cultural revival, the enthusiasm of Han editors in Tibet was frustrated by the initial lack of literary response from the Tibetan people. Eager to discover local talents, they encouraged half-Tibetan half-Han youngsters to write under Tibetan names. Some of these writers-to-be had grown up in Chinese cities with their Han relatives, had received predominantly Chinese educations, and had been called by their Han names all their lives. They arrived to Tibet because either they or their families had been assigned to work in the TAR. Despite their interest and curiosity, Tibetan culture was, for the most part, a new subject to them. Chinese cadres had decided Tibet needed their literary service, and so they were recruited to join a new generation of Tibetan writers.

The most representative example of these ethnically hybrid writers is Zhang Niansheng (also known as Tashi Dawa), the son of a Tibetan father and a Han mother. He was born and raised in Sichuan with his Han family. When he finished high school he moved to Tibet where his

[5] Doležalová 1983: 85.

father had been sent to work. He was illiterate in the Tibetan language and knew very little about Tibetan culture and customs. In 1979, when he was twenty years old, he sent his first short story to the journal, *Literature and Arts from Tibet*. The former literary critic, Zhou Shaoxi, recalls how his father, Zhou Yanyang, an editor with *Literature and Arts from Tibet*, suggested to the young writer that he should claim a Tibetan identity:

> My father read the draft of the first short story by Tashi Dawa, who in those days went by the surname Zhang. He thought it was a good story so he wanted to meet him. At that time Tashi Dawa was very young. When my father realized that Tashi Dawa's father was a Tibetan, he told him he should use a Tibetan name […] From that time on he began signing his works as Tashi Dawa.[6]

A similar case was that of another young intellectual who, like Tashi Dawa, would become a famous Tibetan writer in the 1980s: Xu Mingliang, the son of a Tibetan mother and a Han father. Since his parents divorced when he was a small child, Xu was raised by his father's family in Hunan. He had no contact with his Tibetan family or Tibetan culture until he went to Tibet in his twenties. Upon his graduation from medical school, he was sent to Tibet to work at a hospital but soon became interested in literature. When in 1982 he began writing in Chinese, the only language in which he was literate, he was also advised to claim his Tibetan identity by using a Tibetan name. Since he did not have one, he was suggested to use the name Sebo, which he was told was a Tibetan translation of his Chinese name. In 1983, in a short self-introduction for one of his stories, Sebo wrote about his decision to explore Tibetan culture in order to discover his new Tibetan identity:

> The traditional culture of my nationality […] seems like an immense and profoundly mysterious forest in front of me. As a Tibetan writer I am resolute to explore [it], [as well as] to blaze new trails and to know myself while I am exploring [it].[7]

2. Learning to be Tibetan: Early Writings (1979–1983)

The early stories by Tashi Dawa and Sebo are characterised by an idealised realism. From a literary point of view, they clearly depart from

[6] Personal interview with Zhou Shaoxi (Lhasa, 27 Oct. 1999).
[7] Sebo 1983b: 24.

the socialist realism that had characterised most of Chinese literature since the 1950s. Nevertheless, although these stories explore new ways of expression, they never leave the traditional understandings of structure, time and characters. Thematically, they are characterised by the idealisation of its protagonists, and by a tendency to dichotomise the actions of their characters in terms of 'right' and 'wrong'.

Through the study of these stories it is possible to see the authors' progression from their earlier Han sensibility and preconceptions regarding Tibet to a more Tibet-centred attitude that tries to explore Tibetan culture and ways of thought. While their earlier works respond to what was officially expected from young Tibetan artists at the time—that is to say, to portray the lives of Tibetan people being 'modernised' by the Chinese Communist Party—Tashi Dawa and Sebo soon departed from official postulates to engage in their personal journeys to explore the problems of modern Tibet.

2.1. *Denouncing the Cultural Revolution*

Tashi Dawa and Sebo, like most Chinese intellectuals during the late 1970s, also feel a strong need to denounce the abuses of the Cultural Revolution. Tashi Dawa's first story, "Silence" ["*Chenmo*"], published in 1979 when he was only twenty years old, is the work of a still culturally Han Tashi Dawa who is just beginning to become acquainted with Tibet and with what is expected from his new Tibetan identity.[8] It is the story of a teenage Han girl, Hai Ping, who in 1976, after losing her best friend during the violent repression of the Tiananmen demonstrations in memory of Zhou Enlai, escapes to Tibet. "Silence" shares the characteristics of many other scar stories: it is a strong denunciation of the unfairness of the Maoist period and yet, it still shows clear traits of socialist literature, such as the representation of the main characters as heroes. The story has only one Tibetan character, a girl who befriends the Han protagonist. The Tibetan girl is the only character whose name and personal qualities are not given. Tashi Dawa, still unable to portray Tibetan characters convincingly, has only one way to persuade the reader of the Tibetanness of the girl, and this is to have her repeatedly state her ethnic identity in redundant sentences such as, "several of us, Tibetan girls" [*women jige zangzu guniang,* p.4], "please allow me, this

[8] Tashi Dawa 1979: 4-14.

Tibetan girl" [*qing yunshu wo zhege zangzu guniang* p.14] or "Tibetan girls like me" [*xiang wo zhege zangzu guniang*, p.5].

Sebo's earliest stories also engage in a severe critique of the Maoist period. If Tashi Dawa does this in "Silence" through the descriptions of the suffering of Chinese intellectuals due to political reasons, Sebo often chooses to criticise the Cultural Revolution's destructive effects on the lifestyle and economy of minority peasants. Sebo, initially sent to work as a physician in a rural area of Tibet, wrote his first stories in a way that resembles Han novels depicting the life of the Han 'rusticated youth' sent to regions inhabited by ethnic minorities during the Cultural Revolution. The short story, "The Conch Shell Trumpet Sounded" ["*Hailuo hao chui xiang le"*], tells of a Monba peasant who, afraid that the new directives allowing the private use of the land would not last, fails to make good use of his land, harvests far less than his neighbours and becomes the laughing stock of the village.[9] Sebo portrays the sense of paranoia and deep fear caused by decades of contradictory land policies and violent mass campaigns. As the peasant complains:

> [Party] policies are like wind and clouds, they change three times a day…they fall back and they are restored…[with every] new feudal lord…Heavens! If even the most powerful leaders of the Cultural Revolution had been punished, how can I […] a commoner, survive![10]

Similarly, in the story "The Silly Girl" [*Wuji yongba*], one of the characters summarises the evils of the Cultural Revolution in this way:

> [H]e remembered the times [of the Cultural Revolution when they] made people poor and even said that being poor was good; [when they] made people stupid and even said that being stupid was good.[11]

In spite of using Tibet as the backdrop for their stories, Tashi Dawa and Sebo's denunciation of the Cultural Revolution and their faith in the Chinese promises of reform are very much influenced by the Chinese national mood in the late 1970s. Nevertheless, at a time when many Chinese intellectuals were blaming the tragedies of the Maoist era on what they thought to be the inherent maladies of Chinese tradition, Tashi Dawa and Sebo seemed eager to identify themselves with Tibetan

[9] The Monba is an ethnic minority living in southern Tibet.
[10] Sebo 1982a: 9.
[11] Sebo 1982b: 17.

culture. Still unable to portray the complexity of Tibetan society, their earlier stories tend to either idealise or infantilise Tibetans very much inside the parameters of the prevailing Han views on ethnic minorities.

2.2. *The Idealisation of Tibet*

While in Tashi Dawa's early stories the idealisation of Tibet takes form in the innocence of young Tibetan girls, in Sebo's writings the inhabitants of Tibet are extolled as the keepers of moral values and honesty.

Most of Tashi Dawa's protagonists are Tibetan girls so naïve that they are often unable to face the modern world and end up dependent on either more mature Han characters or on sinicised Tibetan figures. Previous scholarship has noted that the Han image of ethnic minorities is often represented by a female body, either a sensuous one, or that of an innocent girl.[12] In Tashi Dawa's case we find both types, which points, once more, to the strong influence of Han points of view at this early stage.

The protagonists of "Silence" are two young girls, one Han and one Tibetan. While the Han girl is portrayed as a mature teenager who has become disillusioned about the real world, the Tibetan girl is shown as naïve, compassionate and pure. In "Buddhist Pilgrimage" ["*Chao fo*"], written in 1980, we find two young female Tibetan protagonists: the sinicised one is portrayed as educated, modern, independent, talented and fully able to make decisions on her own, while the traditional Tibetan girl is defenseless, childlike, and totally dependent on the advice and help of the sinicised Tibetan girl.[13]

Louisa Schein has pointed out how artistic representation of infantilised minority people together with older Han male figures convey the idea of dependence and submission of minorities to the Han state:

> A 1984 poster introduced a generational element to emphasise [the] paternalistic role of the Party. Literally infantilised minority children, again in full festival regalia […] were shown playing gleefully with, holding the hands of, or even embracing a fatherly Mao Zedong, Zhou

[12] For Chinese ethnic minorities represented by the figures of 'sensuous women' see Gladney 1994: 92-123. For minorities represented as innocent girls see Schein 1997: 69-98.

[13] Tashi Dawa 1980: 3-9.

> Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, and Zhu De. [This image] invoked a Confucian vision of authority—[…] conflating the father-child relation with that of the emperor-subject—to emphasise the ascendance of the Han state. The spectacle—from rosy-cheeked cherubs to ethnologically accurate costumes—was itself what enabled the Party to emerge in high relief, triumphant and progressive.[14]

The image of Tibet (represented by Tibetan women) depending on or submissive to the authority and experience of China (represented by Han males or masculine sinicised Tibetan females) is present in other early stories written by Tashi Dawa. “The Director and Sezhen” [“Daoyan yu Sezhen”] tells the story of a Han theatre director in his fifties who struggles to make a young Tibetan girl become a serious actress.[15] Like another Han stereotype of minorities, that of portraying minority females or children always laughing, we are told that this Tibetan girl laughs at all times.[16] The nineteen-year-old Tibetan girl has no control over her emotions and drives the director crazy with her childlike attitude of eating candy, and bursting into laughter or crying without apparent reason.[17]

One final similarity between the image of Tibet Tashi Dawa conveys in his early stories and that of the common Han representations of minorities relates to the association of minority women to nature. In the case of Chinese pictorials, Dru Gladney points out that,

> [Minorities] are represented as females, by a beautiful, alluring young woman, in a colorful ‘native’ costume. The minorities are almost always portrayed in natural, romantic settings, surrounded by fauna and flora.[18]

In a similar way, Schein points out that minority women are frequently represented “nestled among trees or flowers”.[19] This is how the Tibetan girl protagonist of Tashi Dawa’s “White Poplar Forest, Garland, Dream” [Baiyang lin. Hua huan. Meng] is always seen—walking in a

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[14] Louisa Schein 1997: 90.

[15] Tashi Dawa 1982a: 18-21.

[16] The Han stereotyped representation of minorities laughing is commented, among others, in Clark 1987: and Gladney 1994: 97.

[17] Gladney 1994: 97

[18] Tashi Dawa 1982a: 18.

[19] Gladney 1994: 97.

dense forest of white poplars, or playing and sleeping on a flower field.[20]

In Sebo's young imagination, his idealised Tibet takes shape in industrious and honest peasants who struggle to manifest the official Chinese policies of land reform. The protagonist of "The Silly Girl" devotes herself to her work without ever considering her own benefit. She does her best to help others, even knowing that everybody mocks her for being slightly retarded. Her honesty and hardworking spirit finally gain her the respect of her fellow villagers, and even a marriage proposal, which seems to be the highest honor bestowed on girls in the village. The industrious nature of peasants in Tibet is also praised in "The Conch Shell Trumpet Sounded", where all villagers, with the exception of the 'misguided' protagonist, embrace the post-Cultural Revolution reform policies with enthusiasm, dedication and hope.

In Sebo's early stories, Tibetans are shown as having high moral standards and deep-rooted family values, even to the point of being able to give moral lessons to Han people. "Going Back" [*Gui su*], written in 1983, narrates the story of a Han youngster sent to the TAR to teach at a local school.[21] Voluntarily separated from his family for more than ten years, the Han teacher seems unable to forgive his mother for remarrying. After spending several years in Tibet he falls in love with a local girl and wants to marry her. Her father has only one condition for this marriage—the Han teacher has to return to see his family and ask for his mother's permission. The following dialogue between the Han teacher and his future father-in-law exemplifies Sebo's ideas regarding family values in Tibet:

> "So, since you agree, then the issue of my wedding with Germu is already settled, right?"
> "Who said [I] agree?" asked [Germu's] father.
> "The principal of the school."
> "The principal? Did you ask your mother first? This is the rule [here], do you understand?"
> "Actually, I do not have a mother."
> "Nonsense!" The father stood up. "What kind of man would not recognise his mother? Get ready. You are leaving in three days" [...].
> "I don't want to go back."
> "That is not an option."

[20] Louisa Schein 1997: 75.
[21] Tashi Dawa 1982b: 24.

> "My mother [would] want me to find a job there, but I love Germu."
> "Do as you please, but a man cannot stop loving his mother." Two strings of tears fell down the wrinkled face of [Germu's] father.[22]

The topic of family love and devotion in Tibet also appears in other early stories by Sebo. The protagonist of "Shouting Far Away" ["Chuan xiang yuanfang"] is an old man who awaits the return of his daughter.[23] Widowed and all alone, every day for more than twenty years he has shouted her name from the top of the mountain in the hope that some day she will finally answer his call. Even though everybody in the village tells him to forget about his daughter, he has been working extra hours all those years in order to have enough food to sustain himself and his daughter when she decides to come back.

Some of Sebo's Han characters, although sent to 'civilise' Tibet, end up being 'civilised' by Tibetans. This is certainly the case of the Han teacher in "Going Back". Sent to Tibet to teach the locals, the teacher is instead taught one of the most valuable lessons in life: the importance of family. He seems to feel more comfortable in Tibet than in his hometown, falls in love with a local girl and wants to remain in Tibet forever. He even declares his admiration for cultural characteristics that he believes are present in China's ethnic minorities but not in the Han majority, such as fewer cultural inhibitions while relating with people of the opposite gender, as well as the sincerity of saying what is on one's mind instead of what is socially acceptable. The experiences of the Han teacher bear much resemblance to those of a young Sebo: both were sent to work in Tibet, both decided to remain there, and both seemed to be willing to trade their Han identities for Tibetan ones.

3. Reaching Mature Styles

By the mid-1980s, the predictable and optimistic stories by Sebo and Tashi Dawa gave way to abstract works of obscure messages. For the first time the authors present indigenous traditions and beliefs without praising or criticising them. The supernatural begins to intermingle with the natural in a Tibet that for the authors is not the ordered, logical and idealised place it was before. This change has been commonly

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22 Sebo 1983a: 79-85.

23 *Ibid.*: 84.

attributed to the influence of Western literature, especially Latin American magical realism. The similarities between the recent historical processes of Latin America and Tibet explain the interest magical realism exerted in writers such as Tashi Dawa and Sebo.[24] These lands are rich in oral literatures, myths, legends and folklore, where religion and ritual are key parts of daily life. Both Latin America and Tibet have experienced a powerful syncretism between native beliefs and imposed ones during the process of a traumatising colonialism. What is more, the imposition of a rushed modernisation has led to unstable social phenomena and the dissolution of traditional ways of life. It is not a coincidence that some of the Latin American characteristics the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, often mentioned as instrumental in the development of a new Latin American literature, can be also found in the recent history of modern Tibet—a conflicting ethnic composition of the land, the coexistence of primitive and developed elements in society, revolution and violent upheaval, and an economy dependent on foreign interests.[25]

These are not the only similarities between Latin America and Tibet. They also have in common the phenomenon of ethnically and intellectually hybrid writers, who, although educated under the culture of the colonial powers, still feel a close link with their native lands. This cultural hybridity is what helps writers see 'magic' in native reality, discover details that would surely go unnoticed for those who had never left the native land. This is present in the works of writers all over the world, such as Gabriel García Márquez and Alejo Carpentier in Latin America, Ben Okri and B. Kojo Laing in West Africa, and Tashi Dawa and Sebo in Tibet.[26]

Besides the influence of magical realism, the dramatic changes in Tashi Dawa and Sebo's works are also due to their personal transformations. They were immersing themselves deeper in Tibetan culture and in the contradictions of modern Tibet. The fact that many of the promises made by the Chinese government for the future of Tibet did not materialise explains the general sense of disillusionment and frustration that permeates the works of Sebo and Tashi Dawa in this period. From a literary point of view, they concluded that through realism they would not be able to portray the complexities of Tibetan society.

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[25] See also Erhard's essay in this volume for further discussion of magical realism.
[26] Young 1983: 11.

Tashi Dawa and Sebo begin questioning many of the premises they accepted in their early youth. While their former Han and Tibetan characters got along well, and even helped and depended on each other, their later stories tend to portray Han and Tibetans as two irreconcilable groups. Han people appear rarely in their later stories, as most of the protagonists are usually Tibetans. Their idealised ways of portraying Tibetans—either as primitive and pure, or as moral and industrious—now give way to a detailed array of human passions, many of them far from being commendable. Their innocence and their hopes in Tibet's future inside the new era of Chinese reforms have now dissipated into confusion, uncertainty and irreverence.

3.1. *Description of Han and Tibetans*

In their early stories, still written from a Han perspective, Tashi Dawa and Sebo were unable to portray Tibetan characters convincingly. They often resorted to stating the ethnicity of the Tibetan characters or to having the characters themselves declare their Tibetan identity. As if being Han were the norm, their Tibetan characters still needed to be clearly profiled as 'others'. However, in their later stories, the authors do not feel the need to profile their Tibetan characters. Writing from a Tibetan point of view, the only characters whose ethnicity needs to be stated are those who are not Tibetan, such as Han or Westerners. While in their earlier stories some Han characters were protagonists, now the main characters are always Tibetans, and the Han characters are downgraded to the roles of passersby.

In his mature works Tashi Dawa often represents Han and Tibetans as unable to understand each other. The lack of mutual understanding is based on insufficient knowledge about one another, as well as on their radically different belief-systems. This often leads to frustrating instances of misunderstanding and miscommunication between the two groups. These irreconcilable differences are epitomised by a bizarre encounter between a young Chinese scientist and an old Tibetan herdsman in the short story, "Tibet, the Mysterious Years" [*Xizang: Yinmi suiyue*]. A young Chinese UFO researcher arrives at a desolate mountain inhabited by an old Tibetan man. Since he does not speak Tibetan, the scientist explains the aim of his visit in Chinese:

> I am a member of the Chinese Association for the Study of UFO. I have my credentials here, they are authentic. […] You see, this place is very similar to [Peru's] Nazca plain. My institution may be able to prove that this spot, in ancient times, was in fact a landing place for life forms from [all over] the universe.[27]

The Tibetan herdsman cannot understand a single word the young man says. What he does understand is that the stranger is picking up rocks and probing a soil the old man considers sacred. Replying in Tibetan, he orders the youngster to stop digging in that land:

> What are you doing? If you were an exhausted traveler passing by, I would treat you as my guest. But your eyes are constantly looking at the ground, looking for something. This is not right. I will not allow you to blaspheme this land using your demoniac magic.[28]

The scene ends in a climax of mutual frustration: the young Chinese scientist leaves the mountain crying, powerless to explain the importance of his research to that "old herdsman, who does not understand Chinese, does not understand law, let alone understands what UFO means".[29] When the Chinese researcher is leaving, the herdsman, feeling sorry for the youngster, tries to call him back, although it is all in vain, for his words are in Tibetan, a language the Chinese scientist does not know. But language is not the only obstacle to communication. The scientific importance of that place was as hard to understand for the old herdsman as the sacredness of the mountain was for the young scientist. The oversimplified example of Tibetans as 'religious' and Chinese as 'scientific' serves Tashi Dawa to point out the deeper challenges Tibetans and Han face to understand one another when they are not able to go beyond their belief systems.

Although not as detailed as Tashi Dawa, Sebo also occasionally refers to the topic of how Tibetans are unable to understand Communist

[27] Gabriel García Márquez, before settling in Colombia, lived in several countries of South America, in the United States and in Spain. Alejo Carpentier was deeply influenced by his years of study in Europe before returning to his native Cuba. The Nigerian writer Ben Okri attended school in England for many years, while B. Kojo Laing, originally from Ghana, studied for long time in Scotland. For more on the cultural hybridity of these authors see Enrique Anderson Imbert, *El Realismo Mágico* (Buenos Aires: Monte Īvila Editores, 1976) and Brenda Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

[28] Tashi Dawa 1993: 38-39.

[29] *Ibid.*: 39.

ideas, and how the Communist Chinese are unable to force Tibetans to abandon Buddhism. A short passage in "Board the Boat Here" [*Zai zheli shang chuan*] tells of a group or travelers who arrive to a remote area in Tibet. In spite of being barren and uninteresting, there is still a detachment of the People's Liberation Army there. The presence of the Chinese army seems to have had no influence in the locals who, instead of flying the Chinese Communist flag in their houses, use pieces of it for their Buddhist practices:

> On the other side of the bridge there was a small path full of curves going down to a little white courtyard at the foot of the mountain. It was not far. From were I was I could see the five-color prayer flag fluttered on its roof. Its red part had been torn out of the Chinese flag [and] it was still possible to see the five small yellow stars of the Chinese flag on it.[30]

In Sebo's mature stories, Tibetans are not as happy with the Chinese presence in Tibet as they were in his earlier stories. A Tibetan female character complains briefly but compellingly about Tibet being put on show, presumably by the Chinese, so as to please Western tourists: "I think we [Tibetans] have become like old relics ourselves, so [they] can show us around to the blue-eyed tourists".[31]

Han characters rarely appear in Sebo's later stories, and when they do, they merely become part of Lhasa's chaotic urban scene. The clumsy Han girl who asks a dozen times the prices of different wool sweaters until she realises that all of them have the same price, or the Chinese Muslim peddler running after a sheep who has just eaten part of his mat are quick comic sketches in stories that do not deal with Chinese people anymore. The once idealised representations of characters disappear completely from Sebo's stories. While Sebo had earlier described Tibetans as models of industriousness and morality, now he often describes them in gruesome terms:

> [The old peasant woman] sat by the crossroad at the foot of a wall. She wore a greasy sheepskin robe that exposed her right arm, revealing the filthy sleeve of her read blouse. In front of her, upside down, lay a hat. A humpbacked old man spinning a prayer wheel came out of the alley and threw a bill into it. The old woman sat absolutely still, staring at the golden roof of the temple with a dead expression. After a while she reached into the front of her robe, pulled out a bottle of cheap liquour, and took

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] Sebo 1987: 15.

> a couple of contented swigs. After every swallow she brazenly stuck out her tongue and scratched it with a swollen-knuckled finger.[32]

Tibetans are no longer depicted as the repositories of friendship and family values either. In "Board the Boat Here", a small group of Tibetan tourists gets stranded in a remote land, and for quite some time they think they will never be able to return to the boat landing. Although the tourists are friends, soon tensions arise in the group and one of the Tibetan males begins revealing his despotic and egotistic side. He becomes abusive and often scolds his friends, especially the only female in the group, who is visibly scared by being lost in such a wild area.[33] After years of idealising Tibet, now he decides to present Tibetans as full of low passions as any others in human society.

3.2. *Skepticism and Irreverence*

Buddhism [symbolising Tibetan culture] and Communism [symbolising Chinese ideology] are still present in the later works by Tashi Dawa and Sebo, although these stories clearly reveal their skepticism toward both belief systems. The authors' lack of faith in Buddhism is explained by the fact they were raised in China during the fervently anti-religious Cultural Revolution. Similarly, as their generation grew up during the worst years of Maoist political repression, not much enthusiasm was left for Communist ideas. Their previous representation of kind-hearted Buddhists and devoted Communist cadres seems to have been more motivated by their young idealism than by political and religious beliefs. However, the deeper they became engaged in the problems of Tibet, the farther away they moved from positive descriptions of Buddhism and Communism.

Tashi Dawa's "Tibet: The Soul Tied to the Knots of a Leather Rope" [Xizang, jizai pisheng jie shang de hun] exemplifies this point.[34] The story begins when the first-person narrator, a rather presumptuous socialist writer, realises that the characters of one of his unfinished short stories have somehow acquired life. The protagonists, a pious

[32] Sebo 1987: 17.

[33] Sebo 2001: 206.

[34] "Tibet, The Soul Tied to the Knots of a Leather Rope" [*Xizang, jizai pisheng jie shang de hun*] was first published in *Xizang wenxue* in January 1985. This is Tashi Dawa's most famous short story, although not necessarily his best work. It has been

Buddhist man and his girlfriend, were wandering around Tibet in search for a legendary Buddhist paradise. Because of writer's block, the author had no choice but to stop his story just when his characters were about to cross to the other side of a sacred mountain behind which the paradise was supposed to be. Now, sure he will find his characters in that same spot, the narrator decides to begin a real journey to the mysterious mountain in order to join his protagonists. When he is finally able to find them, the Tibetan male character is dying from a fatal injury, which, ironically, has been caused by a tractor, the symbol of the socialist progress. The narrator, being a committed socialist writer, regrets having created characters so imbued with religion and 'superstition'. He asks himself why he has not been able to create 'new people' instead, strong, positive and productive characters who can serve the needs of the 'glorious' socialist era. At the end he realises that there is still hope for him as writer. After the death of his male protagonist the writer takes the female character back with him, promising he will create a 'new woman' in her. The story ends with the confused woman, following the narrator in the journey back to the socialist world, as submissively and aimlessly as she had followed her boyfriend in his quest for a Buddhist paradise. The author seems to imply that the fate of the woman symbolises the fate of Tibet itself: first led to believe in the promise of a Buddhist salvation, and later forced to follow the path towards a socialist promised land.

Sebo's early themes, such as his negative assessment of the Cultural Revolution or his praise for Tibetan peasants, change now into more realistic, sometimes even mundane concerns. "The Circular Day" tells the story of Nangsel, a teenage Tibetan girl who dreams about going on dates and getting a gymnastic tracksuit with a low v-neck. Many people make fun of her because it is said that she is the product of her mother's sinful relationship with an incarnate lama. At some point of the story, Nangsel enters a jewelry store and the Nepali shopkeeper starts flirting with her. His wife, who is listening to their conversation

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reprinted in most Tashi Dawa's anthologies, such as Tashi Dawa, *Xizang, ji zai pisheng jieshang de hun*. (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1986) and Tashi Dawa, *Xizang: Yinmi suiyue* (Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 1993). There are English translations in Jean Tai, Spring Bamboo (New York: Random House, 1989), Tashi Dawa A Soul in Bondage: *Stories from Tibet* (Beijing: Chinese Literature P, 1992), and Herbert Batt, *Tales of Tibet: Sky Burials, Prayer Wheels, and Wind Horses* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

from behind a curtain in the back of the store, tries to attract his attention with provocative poses so as to end the flirting attempts of her husband with Nangsel:

> The woman gave a pleasant laugh, wrapping herself in the curtain.
> "Get the hell out of here, you she-devil," the shopkeeper roared.
> "Get the hell out? Sure," she said, and, wrapped in the curtain, kicked a sandal at him. "Get the hell out?" she said, and kicked the other one at him.
> The sandals—first one, then the other—struck the shopkeeper in the crotch. His face quivered. He snatched up a sandal and threw it. It hit her on the ass. She let it drop. "Okay," she said. Still wrapped in the curtain, she picked it up and slipped it on. The second one hit her in the breast. "Okay," she said, and slipped it on. Then she writhed wildly, screaming as she twisted herself tighter and tighter in the curtain until her every lust-provoking curve stood out. She cooled down for a second, then wriggled until her breasts bounced like two energetic, frightened colts. "How's that!"[35]

The whole story revolves around irreverent attitudes often characterised by instances of repressed sexuality and lust—the illicit relationship between his mother and the incarnate lama, the lust the Nepali shopkeeper feels for Nangsel, the erotic behavior of the young wife to attract her husband back, Nangsel's desire of exposing her body by wearing a low v-neck tracksuit, or her frustration because boys do not ask her out. The Tibetans who were earlier represented as examples of morality and family values, are now as full of carnal passions as any other human being:

> On the iron fence that ringed the cultural palace hung a huge sign advertising a dance—the men's shoulders were enlarged, the women's buttocks were exaggerated. Beneath the sign sat a Khampa couple, the man's hand rubbing an arousing circle on the woman's breasts. But the woman was staring at the scene around her, popping a piece of chewing gum in her mouth like a Lhasa city-woman.[36]

The process of 'Tibetanisation' of Tashi Dawa and Sebo can be followed through the evolution of their attitudes toward Tibet, as well as through the changes of their literary styles, from their naïve eagerness to become Tibetan and their early stories that idealised Tibet, to their

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[35] Sebo 2001: 208.
[36] *Ibid.*: 213-14. Khampa are people from a Tibetan region called Kham.

later disillusionment and skepticism that translated into novels which often presented confused characters in a society in disarray. In spite of being able to leave behind many of their earlier Han stereotypes regarding Tibet, their works, influence by magical realism, often eroticised and exoticised Tibet, thereby still marking their identities as outsiders to Tibetan culture.

Conclusion

Pressed to produce young Tibetan talents to open the path toward a modern Tibetan literature (under the auspices of Deng Xiaping's government) some Han editors in Tibet suggested Tibetan identities to young writers who, in spite of their Tibetan ethnic heritage, had previously been considered Han. In this way, Zhang Niansheng and Xu Mingliang suddenly became Tashi Dawa and Sebo, although their own ethnic and cultural 'conversions' did not happen right away. It was a process by which they had to learn about Tibet, cope with what was expected from their new identities, and find their own ways of expression.

Their earliest stories are characterised by images about Tibet that fit most common representations of ethnic minorities in Chinese society. While Tashi Dawa's early stories portray Tibetans as innocent, compassionate but somehow still primitive, for Sebo, Tibetans seem to embody the virtues of honesty and morality supposedly lost in Chinese society after decades of Maoist political struggle. However, as soon as Tashi Dawa and Sebo learned more about the problems of Tibet, their idealism gave way to a more real, concerned and sometimes even chaotic depiction of Tibet.

Their mysterious stories and their innovative magical realistic style, typical of their more mature works, soon captivated the imagination of educated Chinese readers. But the blessing of this popularity also had creative drawbacks: the writers were always expected to write stories that could satisfy the Chinese voyeuristic interest in the exotic 'other'. Even more disappointing for the authors was the fact that, although Han people regarded them as Tibetans, most Tibetans still looked at them as Han.[37] In the politically complex scene of modern Tibet, many Tibetan

intellectuals saw Tashi Dawa and Sebo as part of the Chinese cultural establishment.[38]

When I interviewed Sebo in 1999, after he had left Tibet for good, and sixteen years after he had written about exploring Tibetan culture and discovering his Tibetan roots, he talked about how, in spite of all his efforts, he was never able to feel 'Tibetan':

> Tibet inspired me in the sense that it taught me about the way of thought, and the way of life of Tibetans. Writing in Tibet made me feel a lot of pressure because I had to learn more about Tibetan people in order to write about them. Maybe that pressure encouraged me to produce more literary works. […] [But] I never felt I belonged to that place, I never felt I was like the Tibetan people around me. [39]

Sebo's response to that feeling of alienation was to leave Tibet in the early 1990s. Tashi Dawa stayed, but only after finding ways to protect himself against the judgmental look of those who insisted on casting him as one ethnic identity or the other. Magical realism allowed him to find his literary voice, while hiding his true ideas and beliefs behind magical realism's deliberate mystery and ambiguity. Moreover, the internationalisation of his works, through their translation into foreign languages, gave him the opportunity to feel part of world literature, transcending a Tibetan identity that sometimes have been too overwhelming for him.

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[37] Tashi Dawa has acknowledged that his half-Tibetan half-Chinese ethnic background sometimes places him in an identity limbo, not being considered Han by Hans or Tibetan by Tibetans. Personal interview with the author (Beijing, 3 Feb. 1994). During the course of many interviews I conducted in Fall 1999 in Lhasa, Chengdu and Beijing, all Han intellectuals interviewed manifested Tashi Dawa and Sebo were Tibetans. An example of this opinion is that of the Chinese literary critic Zhang Jun, a scholar who has devoted many years to the study of works by Tashi Dawa and Sebo. Regarding the ethnic and cultural identity of these authors, Zhang Jun affirmed: "Although Sebo and Tashi Dawa were not raised in Tibet they are Tibetans. This allows them to connect with Tibetans and to empathise with their problems and concerns in a way not possible for Han authors, even for those Han authors who, like Ma Yuan, resided in Tibet". Personal interview with Zhang Jun (Chengdu, 3 Nov. 1999).

[38] Of the many Tibetan writers who write in Tibetan language I interviewed over the course of Fall 1999, not a single one characterised Tashi Dawa and Sebo as Tibetans, or their works as Tibetan literature. All of them pointed to the fact that both authors were not fluent in Tibetan and could not write in that language. To know more about the relation of language and identity among writers in Tibet see Patricia Schiaffini, "The Language Divide: Identity and Literary Choices in Modern Tibet," *Journal of International Affairs* 57.2 (2004) 81-98.

[39] Personal interview with Sebo (Chengdu, 6 November 1999).

The decision to rush ethnically hybrid writers like Tashi Dawa and Sebo into Tibetan identities resulted in the creation of literary works characterised by the contradictions of the colonial world. It created a literature the Chinese considered Tibetan and the Tibetans considered Chinese, produced works written by 'native' writers but in the language of the coloniser, and provoked stories that often focused on the exotic and emphasised an alleged 'otherness' of Tibet. In spite of this, the contradictions present in the works by Tashi Dawa and Sebo do not diminish their literary achievements. While searching for their ethnic roots they gave new voices to Tibetan beliefs that had been long ignored or dismissed by the Chinese. Their mature works have stimulated Chinese and Tibetan intellectuals alike, both for their innovative literary techniques and for the novelty of their approaches to Tibetan issues. It remains to be seen whether history will remember them for these contributions to the Tibetan literary scene or for the controversies surrounding their ethnic identities.

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MAGICAL REALISM AND TIBETAN LITERATURE

Franz Xaver Erhard

> Irgend etwas einem europäischen Roman entsprechendes gibt es in Tibet nicht, ja, wir müssen sagen, die lamaistische Literatur gehört bei allem religionsgeschichtlichem Interesse, welches sie beansprucht, zum allerlangweiligsten, was sich der normale Mensch vorstellen kann.[1]

Thus reflects August Herrman Francke in a report published in 1906 in the Missionsblatt der Brüdergemeine upon the various obstacles he encounters in editing what was the first Tibetan-language newspaper, the *La dvags ag bar*. One of the main problems in compiling an interesting (and hence commercially successful) paper, he noted, was the lack of entertaining and complex literature in Tibetan. He would have certainly been surprised, and maybe even pleased, to see the development of Tibetan literature over the last two decades.

In fact, in Tibet a secular, or more precisely a fictional literature—apart from a few exceptions, such as *Gshon nu zla med kyi gtam rgyud, Gzhon nu drug gi rtogs brjod* or *Bya mgrin sngon zla ba'i rtogs brjod*[2]—has only developed within the last 50 years under the influence of Chinese political campaigns in Tibet. Mao Zedong had laid down the guidelines for a new Chinese literature in his Yan'an Talks on Literature and Art in May 1942. This literature was named Socialist Realism and was meant to support the party spirit and to serve the politics of the Communist Party. After the so-called peaceful liberation, Socialist Realist literature was also promoted in Tibet. Today the basic principles of the Yan'an Talks are still valid.

However, the liberalisation of the 1980s brought more social und cultural freedoms to the whole of China, and normative and affirmative

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[1] Francke, August Hermann 1906. Vom Redaktionspult der tibetischen Zeitung. *Missionsblatt der Brüdergemeine* 70 11, 359: "In Tibet nothing equivalent to the European novel exists. We even have to say, despite all interest in religious history it claims, one cannot deny that lamaistic literature is the most boring thing one could think of".

[2] For more examples see van der Kuijp, Leonard W.J. 2002. Die tibetische Literatur. *In*: *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft*. Wiebelsheim: Aula, 115-32. While giving an overview of the Tibetan novel, van der Kuijp also emphasises both the Sanskrit origins and the primarily religious function of these works of fiction.

Socialist Realism gave way to a range of literary modes. In Tibet a 'modern literature' (*gsar rtsom*) started to emerge. Tibetan authors emancipated themselves from both traditional poetics and the political function of literature, and started to experiment with different literary techniques. A set of new genres came into existence, and since the 1980s, one can observe beside the still dominant (socialist and critical) realistic literature, free verse poetry, reportage, magical realistic literature, and a great variety of stories written in a highly subjective mode.[3] The major innovation of *gsar rtsom* is its departure from the traditional normative poetics of the Indian writer Dandin, a change which seemingly only became possible through the influence of Maoist aesthetics. In the early 1980s, the Tibetan literary canon was for the first time in centuries opened up for technical and thematic innovation. However, more traditional writers continue to follow the classical norms of poetics and are active in reviving classical literary genres, as can be seen from the numerous literary journals published by monasteries throughout Amdo and Khams.

Traces of literature's overt political function, however, can still be found. For example, some texts were written to expose the errors and misdeeds of the 'Gang of Four', as part of the so called 'literature of the wounded' or 'scar literature' throughout China in the early 1980s. Some of the stories of Don grub rgyal may be included in this category, as could stories which accuse cadres of abusive behaviour[4] or Tibetans of stubborn traditionalism.[5] In textbooks and theoretical articles in literary journals, the social benefit and didactic values of literature are still being discussed.

In the following pages, however, I will first try to establish the notion of magical realism as one among the newly adopted literary modes in Tibetan literary discourse. Secondly, I will take a closer look at two stories by the Amdowan writer Ljang bu which are repeatedly mentioned in Tibetan sources. Finally I will attempt to offer an interpretation of magical realism in Tibetan literature based on these texts in order to show magical realism as literary technique understood by Tibetans as a

[3] A Tibetan term might be *nang gi 'jig rten* (the inner world) or *sems khams*, derived from *rtsom rig sems khams rig pa* or literary psychology.

[4] E.g. O rgyan rdo rje 1987. *Sgo brdung ba'i sgra*. [22.03.1987], *Bod ljongs nyin re'i tshags par.*

[5] E.g. Don grub rgyal's *Sad kyis bcom pa'i me tog* or Rdo rje mkhar, <Reb gong> 2001: Ca ne. *In*: Sgrungs gtam rlabs kyi gzegs ma., *Sangs rgyas* (ed.) Zi ling: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 151–54.

means for the creative re-establishment of Tibetan culture and identity within the context of Chinese modernity.

I

The term magical realism is some eighty years old and its history shows a great variety of use in arts, literary history and theory and, in recent years, postcolonial criticism. It became more recently a term designating a literature from the margins and thus became almost synonymous with terms like 'Third World Literature' or 'Commonwealth Literature' (see Scheffel 1990 and Ashcroft *et al.* 1998). In the West, the notion of magical realism is repeatedly mentioned in connection with Tibetan contemporary literature, usually to label the writings of Tashi Dawa (e.g. Grünfelder 1999; Schiaffini-Vedani 2002). Even though magic realist literature has a long tradition, it only became known in Tibet through Chinese translations of Latin-American writers in the genre, particularly Gabriel García Márquez and his novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, translated in the early 1980s. Thus, intercultural exchange was realised through the medium of Chinese language.

The label magical realism is not only applied by western scholars. Tibetan critics themselves make use of it to designate a literary mode within *gsar rtsom*. For example the author and critic Rdo rje rin chen closes his chapter on Latin American magical realism with his observation:

> Some of our Tibetan authors used this new literary mode [magical realism] as an inspiration, and have composed many literary works. Therefore one can see this [magical realism] also as a starting influence on modern Tibetan literature (Rdo rje rin chen 1998: 423).

Bya gzhung G.yang 'bum rgyal's 1990 article "Magical realism–a new literary writing style"—to my knowledge the first and most detailed Tibetan language article published on magical realism—can be seen as programmatic. For him, magical realism is the most suitable means for the new Tibetan literature to cope with contemporary conditions:

> While some recent young Tibetan authors are making use of this new literary mode, magical realism, they are doing their best to describe their own nationality's life and thereby diminishing the distance between Tibetan literature and World Literature (G.yang 'bum rgyal 1990: 50).

> [...] Because of the very many similarities in reality, legends and customs, and in the Tibetan and Latin American environments, I think, it is beyond doubt that magical realism can spread and develop in Tibet (G.yang 'bum rgyal 1990: 60).

The argument of these Tibetan critics is centred on three characteristics—nature, ethnicity, and ideology—which are seen as shared features of Latin-American and Tibetan culture. Both the Latin American and the Tibetan contexts are understood as characterised by an awe-inspiring force which has had great impact on cultural and social life in the two regions. The diversity within this environment is seen as both intimidating and extraordinarily beautiful:

> The distinct features of the Latin American environment are both wonderful and abundant in its phenomena. For example, the wonderful features of landscape such as dense forests and borderless grasslands, [...] or the steep mountains, long gorges and grand rivers. Furthermore, there are wild beasts, carnivorous animals and other frightening beings [...] (Rdo rje rin chen 1998: 419).

This emphasis on nature alone is not a striking argument, but it might be understood as the fundamental living conditions providing the basis for a radically different perception of nature or reality in general that is characteristic for the native population as opposed to the alien and power-holding population: "[...] in that region [Latin America] the great difference between the white culture's [reality] and the local culture's marvellous reality serves as the basis of the society magical realism originated from" (Rdo rje rin chen 1998: 419f.). The emphasis on nature and environment therefore provides the foundations for the consideration of the question of ethnicity.

"The nationalities living on the Latin American continent are very numerous. Each Indian tribe has its own mythology and stories, its own way of guarding ethics and manners, spirit possession (*lha 'bebs pa*), and religion [...]" (G.yang 'bum rgyal 1990: 51). G.yang 'bum rgyal goes on to cite Alejo Carpentier's description of Latin American reality as one where past and present, ancient and modern are combined in the presence of Indian markets just beneath sky scrapers (G.yang 'bum rgyal 1990: 51).

The main difference between white settlers and native population in these accounts is the radically different relationship to the environment. While the natives are historically and culturally rooted in their environment, the white population of Latin America is seen as in an antagonis-

tic position towards the environment. This is reflecting the Tibetan situation, and in recent publications a specifically Tibetan environmentalist position is currently being developed in which writers always emphasise their uniquely Tibetan point of view, rooted in Tibetan religious beliefs.

The coexistence of two societies, the traditional native society and a modern society, at the same time leads to a merging of two ideological paradigms. One is the local traditional world outlook represented in myths, legends and religious beliefs, while the other is defined by the global or Western concepts of rationality, development and modernity. In the contemporary Latin-American world both paradigms are present at the same time, producing what might be called the magical realist condition: “The borders between birth and death, man, gods, and demons (*mi dang lha ’dre*) are torn down; real objects and non-existent imagination are becoming the same” (Rdo rje rin chen 1998: 422).

Magical realism therefore aims at a new reality that is embracing both paradigms, as opposed to Realism which is seen as serving only the dominant social group, such as in colonial contexts. This new reality, however, would also include the perspective of marginalised parts of society. Both critics mention that magical realism also serves as a means of intellectual resistance against the unjust state systems in contemporary Latin-America. Both authors avoid going any further in this comparison and leave it to the reader to conclude the analogy. In my understanding, the Tibetan reading of Latin American magical realism clearly aims at establishing a parable reflecting Tibetan intellectual realities.

However, the Tibetan reception and adaptation of magical realism is not always seen positively. Gangs bzhad, an exiled critic, identifies the Chinese language stories of the Tibetan writer Tashi Dawa and the Chinese writer Ma Yuan[6] as the main influence on Tibetan magical realism. He acknowledges the creative qualities of both authors, but criticises their works as transporting an arrogant and chauvinistic view of Tibetan culture typical of the Chinese Communist approach:

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6 Ma Yuan (Tib. *Mā yon*), a native of Shanghai, worked as a playwright for the PLA in Lhasa, to where he returned later in the 1980s in search for creative inspiration. Among his more famous magical realist stories is the “Translucent carrot” (see Gangs bzhad [1993]: Gangs seng ’tshol du phyin pa. Slob ma’i dus skabs 1985–1993 *kyi bris rtsom phyogs sgrig*. Dharamsala: DIIR.: 157).

> On the contrary [unlike Latin American magical realists], Tashi Dawa doesn't believe in anything but in Red Chinese atheism. His 'magic' is an intended loophole [*g.yol thabs*] like the magical display of demons, when he fails to give detailed misinterpretations of the many vital issues of real Tibetan history and politics, and a crooked explanation of whatever he remembers of Tibetan society (Gangs bzhad 1993: 156f.)

Magical realism here is understood as a powerful means to misrepresent Tibetan culture and to create an exotic depiction of Tibet as a backward, barbaric and superstitious country. But Gangs bzhad is concentrating on authors writing in Chinese, while G.yang 'bum rgyal and Rdo rje rin chen are taking a more theoretical standpoint and are including some Tibetan language examples.

II

Unfortunately, only a few Tibetan examples of magical realistic writing are mentioned by these critics. But among them one always finds the two early stories of Ljang bu "*Sog rus las mched pa'i rnam shes"* (Rdo rje tshe ring 2001) and "*Shi gson"* (Rdo rje tshe ring 1987), which may be the first Tibetan language examples in this mode. However, Gangs bzhad criticises "*Sog rus las mched pa'i rnam shes*", because of its heavy borrowings from Tashi Dawa, as plagiarism, and is much more in favour of "*Shi gson*". Ljang bu indeed is very likely to have been strongly influenced by Tashi Dawa's stories since he translated some of them into Tibetan. In recent years, other examples in the genre have appeared, including "*Sbyang ki lug rdzi dang kho'i chung ma*" (Bkra shis don grub 1993), "*Lha sa'i gtam rgyud*" (Skyabs chen bde grol 1999), "*Gangs*" (Pad ma tshe brtan 1999), some of the writings of Klu smyon he ru ka[7] or Tshe ring don grub's novel "*Mes po*" published in 2001.

Ljang bu, born in Sog po (Henan county in Qinghai province), is one of the most prominent and celebrated Tibetan writers, even though he is of Mongolian nationality. His real name is Rdo rje tshe ring, and

[7] Klu smyon he ru ka, an exiled writer, sees himself in the tradition of Tibetan magical realism as it was founded by Tashi Dawa, being strongly influenced by Márquez, Ljang bu and Stag 'bum rgyal. He is one of the few authors who label their own writings as magic realistic (see Klu smyon he ru ka 1999: *Bdag dang 'brong gi pha sa.* [Kathmandu]: [Sgo mang glog rtsis dpe skrun khang]. (= [*Gsung 'bum*] deb gsum pa).: 74f.)

while he publishes free verse poetry under the pen name Ljang bu, his essays and stories appear under the pen names Bse ru or Chab brag Rdo rje tshe ring.[8] However, his works seem recently to have appeared less frequently and no new stories have been published for about five years.

The two stories I will focus on here were published in 1986 and 1987 in the literary magazine *Sbrang char*, under the pen name Ljang bu. Both are *sgrung 'bring ba*, or medium-length stories. The earlier story, "*Sog rus las mched pa'i rnam shes"*, is rather obscure. Even its title is ambiguous, since *sog rus* can either be translated as 'shoulder blade' or as 'Mongolian clan'. In the context of the story 'shoulder blade' is clearly the intended meaning, but the second connotation is still significant, given the author's nationality.[9] The world of the story is entered through the cracks of a sheep's shoulder blade (*sog rus*) and is called "a dreamland unlike a dream" (139). The reader is taken on a journey into the reality of the dreams and emotions of the narrator. The first-person narrator receives a divine order to search for the one story that only he would be able to tell. So the narrator starts his quest. Somewhere in the grasslands he meets an old man who conducts a shoulder blade divination (*sog pa'i mo*). The cracks in the shoulder blade reveal the old man's own nomadic life story, which takes up the rest of the narration and turns out to be the story the narrator has been seeking. Therefore, one could call the narrator's quest for a story and his comments on events the framing narration or extradiegetic narra-

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[8] Chab brag is an invented family name referring to a mountain in the homeland of the author—Sog po—called Chab dbrag. A few publications appeared under this name presumably to make possible a distinction from other writers called Rdo rje tshe ring, e.g. Chab 'gag Rdo rje tshe ring, possible. The original name of the family used to be lce nag but according to Rdo rje tshe ring it is long since out of use (Rdo rje tshe ring 2003b: Biography. Interview, Paris, 31.05.2003.) For more information on the personal history of the author see Dhondup, Yangdon 2002: "Writers at the Cross-roads. *The Mongolian-Tibetan* Authors Tsering Dondup and Jangbu". *Inner Asia* 4(2), 225–40.

[9] Therefore the translation of the title would be "Consciousness drawn from a shoulder blade". Lauran Hartley, however, translates "Consciousness from Mongolian bones" (Hartley, Lauren R. 2003: Contextually Speaking: Tibetan Literary Discourse and Social Change in the People's Republic of China (1980–2000), Department of Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University: Dissertation, 392). The text itself makes Hartley's translation rather improbable, since a shoulder blade is the centre piece of the story. Ljang bu himself is aware of the common misinterpretation of the title and pointed out to me that the interpretation of *sog rus* as 'Mongolian clan' was a possible reading, but in the context of the story clearly shoulder blade was the intended meaning (Rdo rje tshe ring 2003a: On magical realism. Interview, Paris, 31.05.2003.)

tion. The main narration is the life story of the old nomad retold by the narrator, perhaps according to his own dreams.

The second story, "*Shi gson*", published a year later, is more accessible. The story is set in a semi-pastoralist (*rong ma 'brog*) mountain village. After an old villager has died, an old women goes insane and another young woman disappears. The villagers explain these incidents in a pan-deterministic way, and interpret it as supernatural intervention—as examples of spirit possession, *'das log*, spirits and demons in the surrounding forests. A gu Rngon pa, an experienced and rationally minded hunter, takes up the task to investigate the events and searches for the missing woman. The search leads him into the mountain forests and into local legends and myths as well as into his own memories and reflections. In the end he finds the young woman held hostage by a *mi dred*.[10] Supported by a group of forest guards, he tries to hunt down the *mi dred* who in turn kills him with one of the stones which these creatures conceal under their arms. The narrative structure of "*Shi gson*" is less complicated and, as in typical realistic narration, follows a basically linear pattern, focussing on the main protagonist A gu Rngon pa.

"Sog rus las mched pa'i rnam shes" and "*Shi gson*" both depart considerably from the aesthetics of socialist realism. The reality described in them is the internal reality of the protagonist's reflections and dreams, and the reality, as indicated by the auther, conceived by the majority of the Tibetan population. Two examples of this include the use of spirits and demons to explain events in "*Shi gson*", and the causal connection established between events which would otherwise seem only to have a temporal or chronological relation. A gu Rngon pa, who is highly critical at the beginning of his inquiries, gets drawn into this Tibetan world outlook and encounters a mythological creature, which all Tibetans whom I have asked believe to exist or at least to have existed in former times. Likewise, the worries and internal struggles 'excavated' by the narrator of "*Sog rus las mched pa'i rnam shes*" by

[10] The term *Mi dred* is derived from *dred mong*, which is a brown bear that lives on the *Byang thang* or Northern Plateau and is said to behave very much in a human manner. The term *Mi dred* then suggests that the being in discussion might be half man and half bear, and thereby enters the realm of legend and mythology. There are many stories relating to the *dred mong* and/or *mi dred*, among them the motif of the male *dred mong* kidnapping young women and hiding them away in remote mountain caves. The *dred mong* / *mi dred* is also said to carry or hide various objects under his armpits.

entering the chest of the old nomad reflect the basic concerns of Tibetan nomadic life.

Each story is thus centred on traditional concepts rooted in the traditional Tibetan cultural system. In "*Sog rus las mched pa'i rnam shes"* it is the practice of scapulimancy (*sog pa'i mo*),[11] while in "*Shi gson"* it is the reference to a whole range of local traditions and beliefs such as the *'das log*-genre, spirit possession (*'dres bzung*), legends of Buddhist heroes, and finally the *mi dred*. In both stories the protagonist's encounter with these 'magical' elements leads him into reflections upon society.

At the same time both stories contain a realistic and detailed description of rural Tibetan everyday life, of landscape, villages, the people, their work, and so forth. In "*Sog rus las mched pa'i rnam shes"*, the hardships of a nomad family's life and a worn-out relationship make up the centre piece of the story. The old man follows his wife with his eyes while she is struggling on her way to the spring. He remembers the days when he was enamoured of the young beauty his wife used to be and he realises that he is no longer in love. In "*Shi gson"* the remote mountain village is repeatedly portrayed with its surrounding fields, the irrigation channels and forests and mountains in the background. The people of the Tibetan village in this story work together in a cooperative of farmers and pastoralists, and they take turns in guarding the fields.

Much attention is paid to the atmosphere created by a combination of daytime, landscape and weather; this atmosphere seems to reflect the protagonists' feelings and thoughts. In addition, it is through the description of atmosphere that 'magic' is able to enter the story. But one should differentiate between two kinds of magic in magical realist texts. The first involves day-to-day reality, enlarged by local mythological realities through the interpretation of events, landmarks, history and so on that are provided by local legends, myths and the regulations and rituals they result in. This kind of magic can be understood as a means to make the real world appear magical and to give voice to a marginalised world view. The second kind of magic is what Wendy B. Faris calls "an irreducible element of magic" (Faris 1995). It refers to

[11] *Sog pa'i mo* is a divination method in which a sheep's shoulder blade is thrown into fire and then the cracks are interpreted. The description Ljang bu gives in the story agree with the descriptions of the ritual that I have found (Rockhill, W.W. 1891: *The Land of the Lamas*. London: Longmans, Green, & Co. 166, 176–77, 341–44. I am also grateful to Toni Huber, who kindly provided me with some of his field notes).

something that is clearly impossible to explain within the framework of rationality and science, in short something irrational. For example, the narrator of "*Sog rus las mched pa'i rnam shes*" wants to take the point of view of one of his characters (internal focalisation, in the terminology of Gerard Genette) and in order to do so actually enters his chest, to learn more about his emotions. Also, the man-like bear or *mi dred* stealing young women in "*Shi gson*" is part of another reality.

Both stories make use of either kind of magic. In "*Sog rus las mched pa'i rnam shes*" the first type of magic dominates. The reader never knows whether the events in the story are part of reality or part of the dreams and thoughts of the narrator. He is left in an uncertainty, which calls into question the truth of the story.[12] This uncertainty is supported by the following episode: The nomad family happens to be photographed by a satellite camera, leading to various scholars and scientists offering interpretations of the picture, calling it a "living example of a feudal and backward way of life" (143). The autodiegetic narrator of "*Sog rus las mched pa'i rnam shes*" dismisses the scientists' approach, commenting critically and ironically, "What, in any case, is true of what scholars say?" (144)

In "*Shi gson*" the second type of magic is dominant and nothing actually 'magical' happens until A gu Rngon pa's encounter with the *mi dred*. But the reader is drawn into a similar uncertainty by the offered interpretation of events as 'magical'. Suddenly reality appears in the light of magic. The explanation of events as divine intervention by *'dre* or by the wandering soul of a dead person becomes highly realistic just when A gu Rngon pa is actually killed by the mythic *mi dred*. When A gu rngon pa disregards the popular interpretation of the encounter with an owl as a bad omen (*than bya*) and his trip nevertheless turns out to be his last journey, the reader does not know what to believe and is once again left in uncertainty. The two stories (and the two kinds of magic) weaken the borders between the real and the dreamlike (*sog rus*) or mythic. The use of magic enables the existence

[12] Todorov developed various categories of the fantastic based on the degree of uncertainty in which the reader is kept. Since magical realism is a genre always close to the fantastic, his concept of 'uncertainty' might as well apply for the texts under discussion here (see Todorov, Tzvetan 1992: *Einführung in die fantastische Literatur.* Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer. (= Fischer Taschenbuch. 10958).) For a discussion of the relation between magical realism and the fantastic see Chanady, Beatrice Amaryll 1985: *Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy: Magical Realism and the Fantastic*. New York: Garland.

of both realities at the same time and results in some kind of general uncertainty about the truth of the stories and about reality.

A Tibetan interpretation of the stories more in line with contemporary political views can be found in Go po lin 1998, in which what I call 'magical', Go po lin labels 'superstitious' (*rmongs dad*). He maintains that Ljang bu's intention is to "clearly show and criticise the backward and superstitious beliefs" (Go po lin 1989: 298).This is certainly a possible interpretation—and *Gangs bzhad's* critique of Tashi Dawa would then be valid for Ljang bu as well. But no matter if one terms it 'magic' or 'superstition', these irrational elements form an important part of Tibetan reality, and one has to agree with Ljang bu that his writings belong more to a form of Tibetan realism,[13] since he tries to describe Tibetan reality not from an outsider's perspective, nor with the ideologically filtered vision of a social reformer, but in terms of the reality shaped by the lived belief systems and religion of Tibetans.

However, there is another important difference between the two stories which relates to the relationship between magical realism and postmodernism in general. Interestingly, "*Shi gson"*, the second story, is much easier to mark as and locate in magical realism, while the first story "*Sog rus las mched pa'i rnam shes"* tends to escape quick classifications. If it not for the above mentioned Tibetan critics who themselves label it magical realistic, I personally would rather try to locate the story in the broader field of postmodern fiction, particularly with regard to the 'magical' elements, such as the autodiegetic narrator entering the chest of the intradiegetic protagonist, which can be understood as a provocation to a realistic mode in general and a questioning of the knowledge of the narrator. Additionally, at some occasions—most explicitly in the last paragraph—the reader is actually addressed directly. The role of the narrator and the act of narration is thus highlighted, and the reader is constantly reminded that the story is actually told as a work of fiction. On the level of discourse, the actual story is preceded by metaphoric images like the boat in stormy sea, the narrator's dream and his order to go and search for the one and only story. These parts are meant to set the reader onto the right path in interpret-

[13] This was Rdo rje tshe ring's main objection to the term magical realism. In his stories, he maintained, nothing is magical. Since Tibetans believe in gods (*lha*), demons (*'dre*) and magic (*sngags, mthu*) he insists that his stories are more realistic (*dngos yod*) than magical realistic (*sgyu 'phrul dngos yod*) (Rdo rje tshe ring 2003a: on magical realism. Interview, Paris, 31.05.2003.)

ing the following text. In the course of narration the reader is always referred back to these initial images of fate and destiny: Thus the description of an ant crawling along the cracks in a sheep's shoulder blade can easily be recognised as just another allegorical image of human fate or destiny thereby referring back to the ship in stormy sea. The narrative structure therefore is far from being realistic, which would be a prerequisite for magical realism.

III

As Wendy B. Faris points out, magical realistic texts contain an irreducible magical element, something outside the conventional perception of the world that cannot be rationally explained. The textual world refers to the real world external to the text. This real world that provides the frame of reference is enlarged through a fictional, irrational world, based on axioms that are accepted by the characters and the readers alike. A border-crossing continuity spanning two or more worlds is created, resulting in an ambiguity that calls into question the conventional concepts of space, time, identity and truth.

Magical realistic writing, which as we have seen is based on premodern belief systems, local myths and legends, can be considered as an ex-centric antithesis to the central concepts of the dominant culture. In contrast to the dominant culture, whose hegemonic claims introduce modernity, the magical and irrational elements of the narration represent local and often oral traditions, which stand in diametric opposition to the concepts of modernity. However, these texts should not be interpreted as conveying an anti-modern position. On the contrary, authors like Rdo rje tshe ring are well educated in both traditional Tibetan culture and contemporary sciences, and form the intellectual elite of Tibetan society. Their literature offers the possibility of a modernity that is aware of local history, tradition and culture and allows this awareness to influence the construction of a modern identity.

This theory of magical realistic literature, based largely on postcolonial literature, cannot be applied uncritically to contemporary Tibetan literature. For example, many Tibetan authors write in their own language whereas postcolonial authors usually use the colonial language. Nevertheless this theoretical approach may also be used in the context of Tibetan literature, to the extent that Tibetan culture is marginalised

by the dominant Chinese culture and Tibetan society modernised according to Chinese socialist principles. The Chinese representation of Tibetan society and culture as backward, superstitious and altogether pre-modern (*rjes lus, rmong dad, kla klo*), combined with the Chinese wish to modernise Tibetan society—meaning, essentially, to adapt it to Chinese society—is similar to the intellectual claim of European colonials. Since magical realist texts aim at representing the total reality, they contain two conflicting ideological or discursive systems at the same time: realism representing the coloniser's language and elements of magic representing local traditions.

> That suspension between two discursive systems resembles the colonial subject's suspension between two—or more—cultural systems, and hence serves to reflect the postcolonial situation especially well. It has therefore served a decolonising role, one in which new voices have emerged, an alternative to European Realism (Faris 2002: 103).

The literary 'technique' of magical realism makes subversive writing possible by breaking up any rational and realistic concept of linearity, space, and time, and thereby radically calling any truth into question. However, Tibetan magical realism cannot merely be considered in relation to (Han) Chinese literature and culture, but is also an expression of the hybridisation of Tibetan culture. For this reason contemporary authors question the idea that either Buddhism or Chinese-imposed socialism provides the central paradigm for Tibetan culture. The radical scepticism of magical realist writing creates a third space, within which modern Tibetan identity and Tibetan felt history can be articulated. It therefore comes as little surprise that Ljang bu's narratives focus on ordinary people and should use folk-religious beliefs rather than Buddhism or its philosophical schools to represent local traditions.

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PEMA BHUM ON TIBETAN LITERATURE AND THE LATSE TIBETAN LIBRARY

An interview by Gray Tuttle (Columbia University)

Writer and critic Pema Bhum is the the Director of the Latse Contemporary Tibetan Cultural Library in New York City. For further information, consult the library's Web site at http://www.latse.org. Pema Bhum was interviewed at Latse Library on September 7, 2003.

I. Latse Contemporary Tibetan Cultural Library

Gray Tuttle: What is the mission of the library?

Pema Bhum: Tibetan culture has a past, present and future. We thought that many institutions and libraries focused on the past of Tibetan culture. But the present Tibetan culture is changing. It is different from the old culture in which religion, Tibetan Buddhism, was very important. The present culture is mixed up with Chinese and Western cultures. The whole world is changing; communication is much more frequent. So, we wanted to face the challenges that some part of Tibetan culture is reforming. This present part—as far as we know—is not the focus of any other library or institution. Now many people are interested in Tibetan Buddhism. In many decades, people will look back and see a gap in research on the modern Tibetan situation, and we will fill this gap when people look back. That is why we are interested in contemporary Tibet.

GT: Do you only think about looking back from twenty years in the future?

PB: Good point. These days there is a great deal of publishing activity and many writers in Tibet, but recent publications are not accessible outside of Tibet. We want people to have access to many media. We are thinking that this institute can be a bridge between Tibetans and Tibetologists in Western countries and Tibet. Each side has its own strengths. If the two strengths melt together this will move forward, improve Tibetan studies. Like this year, from November 7th to the 9th, we will host a workshop on Gedun Choephel (1903–1951). Tibet's first

critical thinker about Tibetan religion and literature, the first Tibetan to ask "Is this right or not?" and go to India to check, and the first person to encounter Western knowledge and introduce it into Tibet. We have invited six people from inside Tibet—such as Gedun Choephel's widow, daughter, and cousin—and ten from outside Tibet. We are trying to gather his materials to create an archive to make available to research scholars and everyone who wants to know about Tibetan cultures. We also plan to invite not just scholars, but also performers and artists to lecture, to exchange knowledge and thoughts. We have a biweekly movie series. Last week (July 5, 2003) we showed films on Muslims in Tibet and a documentary of Alexandra David-Neel's journey to Tibet.

GT: What are some of the other activities the library holds?

PB: We try to break the conception that a library is just books and reading materials. Tibetan culture is something we can hear and see from tapes, CDs, and real people, while paying attention to the different customs of specific areas. We hope to invite experts to demonstrate calligraphy, how we make pens, ink, and how to hold the paper. Also, we have, I think, the biggest collection of videotapes and VCDs, with over a thousand items. So we focus not just on reading but also hearing and seeing.

GT: Why is the library here in New York?

PB: The main reason is that New York is a world cultural city, a good place to share different nations' cultures. Also, I don't know if it is true, but we say that there are 5,000 Tibetans (from both China and India) in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Boston. Taken together, maybe it is true.

GT: If things changed, would you like to see the library move to Tibet?

PB: This is beyond my position to answer, as Trace has built this library. But I am sure that Trace wants to build more libraries and to support the cultural tradition in Tibet. They are aware of the lack of public libraries there.

GT: What are some of the unique holdings of the library?

PB: This library is unique for three reasons. First, most contemporary Tibetan writers' works are here, with hardly a single book missing. As far as we know, no other library has gathered as much in contemporary writers' work. Secondly, we also collect all related Chinese materials; government publications, as well as works by individual writers

and scholars. To research the contempFor example, if you want to research population, economy or education, you won't find many materials in English. The sources are mostly in Chinese. Nowadays Chinese writers' interest in Tibet has really increased, and there is more objective and personal interest, not simply the government's views. Now individual intellectuals and writers look at the Tibetan people and environment really objectively. In the history of China, we are seeing the greatest number of objective writers now. We, of course, collect all English materials, but this is not as unique. Thirdly, we collect Tibet-related audio-visual material from all over the world. It's not just about reading books, but a form of cultural exchange or enjoyment.

II. Tibetan Literature

GT: Could you talk about your own development and experiences as a writer?

PB: Some westerners and Tibetans have called me a scholar or writer, but in my heart I still have not accepted this. When I was a child a 'scholar' or 'writer' was considered to be an extraordinary person, something that could not be reached by normal people like me. Though I am older now, this thought still sticks in my brain, and that is why I couldn't accept it. As for being a scholar, when I think about what I know, it seems to me not much; but in terms of experience, I did grow up in Tibet, in the Tibetan culture. Nor do I consider myself a "writer" for I do not have many [finished] works. But, Tibetans like my writing style—clear, not fancy, but easier to understand. I do have a strong Tibetan language foundation. I am working on the biography of my teacher, Rdo rje tshe ring, during the Cultural Revolution, and my knowledge of Tibetan is dependent on him—I did not stop studying during the Cultural Revolution. He struggled with school authorities and to avoid criticism even used Mao Zedong's quotations to teach Tibetan grammar and spelling. He died in 1985. He was a really big influence, why I can write in Tibetan. In Rebgong, some from my generation can also do this, because he stood up first, saying sincerely that the students needed to understand Mao in Tibetan. In other Tibetan areas people from the same generation do not tend to know Tibetan as well. After 1970, Tibetan grammar was totally different. The punctuation follows Chinese; the verb terms have been simplified, just using

helping verbs; some letter combinations have been thrown out. Rdo rje thse ring stood up. He was the only one. He taught traditional grammar. He tried to argue against language reforms.

I also worked for seven years in Malho Sokbo (Mongol) County. There, during the Cultural Revolution, many people lost their chance for an education. My knowledge was so poor, with only a middle-school education, but after a few months I became famous as a "scholar" there, because I could write Tibetan and Chinese. Chinese documents were broadcast at dictation speed {He mimics the slow sounding out of a Chinese sentence}, and I had to translate these into Tibetan. Officials, even Tibetans, preferred to give speeches in Chinese; I translated these too. The middle school math text was in Chinese, but the nomads did not understand Chinese. So I translated it. So, even during the Cultural Revolution, when there was no normal way to learn Tibetan, my Tibetan really improved through all of this translation work. But I got tired of nomad life—rain, snow, horseback. I felt that what I knew was too limited. I took the entrance exam to the Northwestern Minority Nationality Institute in 1979. There were thirty-seven students in the Tibetan Language and Literature major, but thirty-two knew no Tibetan—not even the alphabet. Some also did not speak Tibetan. Of those five who knew Tibetan, four were from Rebgong, one from Chabcha.

GT: What is your connection to the Tibetan literature being written these days?

PB: I did not write so many Tibetan literary works while in Tibet; just two articles. In 1981, I wrote something I had no intention to write. But I read an article in Chinese about where the Tibetan national essence originated. In response to this Chinese article, I compared Tibetan historical literature, archaeological discoveries and the Chinese classical history books. This article was published in *Mtsho sngon slob gso* (Qinghai Education). Later, someone named Shes rab translated this into Chinese and published it in *Xizang yanjiu* (Tibet Studies). In 1983, I wrote my undergraduate senior thesis on songs from Dunhuang manuscripts, and this was published by the Northwestern Minority Nationality Institute. Later I wrote my master's thesis on Tibetan literature, but it was not published for political reasons after I escaped to India.

In 1980, the literary journals "Light Rain" (*Sbrang char*) and "Tibetan Literature and Arts" (*Bod kyi rtsom rig rgyu rtsal*) started.

Before that, newspapers had published literary works. In the mid-1970s, an underground movement was organised to print classical Tibetan books and circulate them within certain circles. We would make some fifty copies of works like Gedun Choephel's *White Annals* [of the Tibetan imperial period] and the fifth Dalai Lama's commentary on the *Snyan ngag me long* [an Indian treatise on poetics]. In the early 1980s, I studied '*snyan ngag*' [poetics] with Alak Tsetan Shabdrung. He required students to write poetry for class. I only wrote poetry for that reason…as homework. But I did not publish because I was tired of praise verse. The editors and writers were still too far to the left. Only poetry about national holidays, the anniversary of the establishment of the People's Liberation Army, and the motherland, only work that was too political was published. Don grub rgyal was exceptional in writing in other genres, but he also praised the party, the motherland. That literature had to take social responsibility, to try to lead people's actions, point out the dark side, the backward side. Tibetan literature is still under this influence. In poetry, essays, comedies, Tibetans criticise how Tibetans fight over the grasslands, also arranged marriage, religion—thinking, 'stupid Tibetans'. Writers are taking responsibility for something they cannot take responsibility for. They just give free advice. But I felt, this is not my job. I cannot solve that. People just sit in the classroom and say, "That's stupid, stupid". I stayed many years in the grassland and know in detail the relationship between the nomads life and the grasslands. It's not so simple as reading a few books and calling their fighting 'stupid'.

GT: What other weaknesses do you see in modern Tibetan literature?

PB: The literary theoretical terms that Tibetans think in are too old. Most Tibetans, especially those my age, if they are good writers, they have a lot to write about because we went through so much. In 1958 the Chinese killed so many Tibetans, in the 1960s there was so much starvation, stealing food—I still have that memory—the Cultural Revolution in their own lives, their own villages. But people put aside the experiences of their own generation and instead write about things they don't know well, trying to advise people. They don't trust their own eye. A lot of Tibetans use other eyes, other theories, to look for something to write about. The younger generation has another weakness. In the post-Cultural Revolution era, Tibetans think the Chinese are so backwards, and the west is so great. Tibetans try to write poems that are hard to understand, introduce new terms such as 'stream of con-

sciousness'. They are still following Chinese developments. If a poem is really good and makes sense, then they think it's backwards. But western poems do not circulate among the whole population, they have a certain readership. In "Light rain", from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, the poems are hard to understand, because they are too experimental. This is fine, but it is wrong to say that the future of Tibetan poetry must follow this direction, with the assumption that experimental poetry is more advanced. Readers and editors spoiled the writers. Readers are afraid to say, "I don't understand", so the writing got worse and worse.

GT: What are the strengths of modern Tibetan literature?

PB: There are great things. And I appreciate and want to thank Tibetan writers. Because Tibetan writing cannot be used in administration and business, but writers have so much enthusiasm for literature, the biggest outpouring in our history, writing poems and short stories in the Tibetan language. They make it alive. Seventy to eighty percent of them learn traditional writing in class. Some learn it really well, and though some might not agree, I think that some even learn it better than classical scholars. Some mix the Chinese and Western eye and try their best to describe social problems and their solutions and take responsibility. It is the only forum to discuss social problems; a limited forum, but the only one available in the Tibetan language. So it is used to reform and change Tibetan society. I felt this outside the exiled community. But the Tibetan exiled government does not acknowledge this role, although the Dalai Lama once said that Tibetan writers and scholars did a good job, showing his appreciation.

GT: What about Tibetan writing in other languages (Jamyang Norbu in English, Dawa Norbu in Chinese), is it Tibetan literature?

PB: There are two points of view on this question. One group says that anything written by a Tibetan is Tibetan literature. Another group says that it must be in Tibetan. from this library's perspective, we collect everything—even English and Chinese, as long as it is related to Tibet.

GT: Are the Tibetans thinking about taking part in world literature?

PB: These days some Tibetan writers do talk about the concept of 'world literature'. Generally speaking, the number of young Tibetan intellectuals reading foreign literature through Chinese has been increasing ever since the late 1970s. By the mid-1980s, if an undergraduate student couldn't chat about foreign literature, it was as if he could-

n't join in with the intellectuals. Meanwhile, Tibetan writers were imitating Chinese literature, and Chinese writers were imitating foreign literature. In this way, Tibetan writers developed a closer relationship with world literature. Moreover, these days a group of westerners have begun researching Tibetan contemporary literature and translating works into English, thereby introducing Tibetan writers to foreign readers. Through our Latse newsletter we are trying to promote such exchange. For example, in our recent issue, we introduced a writer (*Gangs zhun*) and translated one of his poems. We also translated into Tibetan an article entitled "What is world literature?" by Professor David Damrosch. In future issues, we plan to introduce famous western writers and their works to Tibetan readers in translation.

GT: The Amnye Machen Institute where you worked in exile in Dharamsala, India translated some works from western languages into Tibetan. Why?

PB: One reason was that so many works have been translated from Tibetan into English. We strongly felt that we needed to do the reverse. Second, Tibetans in Tibet have been translating (and imitating) western works, but always through Chinese. We wanted to translate directly into Tibetan. Third, the works translated from Chinese are really old, like Shakespeare and Goethe, so there is no contemporary material to work with, like *Animal Farm*. We thought it was necessary for the Tibetan people to know about these contemporary works.

GT: What have been the effects of politics on Tibetan literature?

PB: During the Cultural Revolution, political activities had a big influence especially on young students. There is a saying, *Yi ku, si tian* (Remember suffering, think of happiness). This means that the old society before Communist control was bad, and after Communist control, so happy. Meetings would ask the old people to remember their stories of suffering, and then describe how they were happy, now they can read books, go to the hospital. The influence of this was so strong, even after the Cultural Revolution. By the end of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese writers were tired of criticising the Old Society. They instead began to write about suffering experienced during the Cultural Revolution. Tibetan writers, however, only then began to write about suffering in the 'pre-liberation' or old society. It wasn't due to a lack of freedom. Poems by Chinese writers at that time criticised the new polices and the Gang of Four, while at the same time mourning the loss of Zhou Enlai. Instead, Tibetan writers were still under the influ-

ence of the Cultural Revolution.

GT: What do you think about exiled Tibetan literature?

PB: Among the older scholars in exile, many write literature in the broad sense, not just fiction. From their writings, people outside Tibet have come to know about Tibetan culture and the Tibetan situation. Among the middle-aged generation, Tibetans now in their 40s or 50s, several have excellent Tibetan and there are even a few excellent scholars, but not many write literature. Pema Tsewang Shastri is probably the only person of this generation to have written a novel in Tibetan. I have heard that copies of his two novels have reached Tibet, and readers there enjoyed them as a way of learning about the life and struggles of a person growing up in exile.

Only a few Tibetans writing in English—such as Jamyang Norbu and Dhompa Tsering Wangmo—have gained notoriety among Western readers. If we could translate their works, I think Tibetans in Tibet would appreciate this.

Finally, several people who recently left Tibet have been starting magazines and newspapers in exile, where they publish poetry and short stories in Tibet. They are the most active in terms of any Tibetan literary movement outside of Tibet.

GT: Is ethnic literature taught in China (to Chinese)?

PB: I don't think so. It is only for Tibetans. The Chinese don't want to learn. They still look down on minority cultures. At least it used to be that way.

GT: When and why did modern Tibetan literature start?

PB: Tibetan literature started in 1980 with the founding of *Tibetan Literature and Arts*, there were only a few scattered examples before that. There are two reasons for the late start. Tibetan culture and people never had as much contact with other people as they did in the Cultural Revolution. Before, the contact with Indians, a long time ago, was only through a few scholars and for the purpose of translation. After the Chinese Communist take over, the whole nation was merged into another nation and culture. Chinese bureaucracy, language and culture became the big fashion, especially after the 1980s, for my generation. This was the first time to get a chance to go to a standard university; the first time to comprehensively get world literature and Chinese literature. We did not have novels, as descriptive stories of people's lives. This was a big influence. Secondly, some Tibetans only knew Chinese and not Tibetan, and they criticised the Tibetan language, saying it was

only for Buddhism and was incapable of being used for writing novels and short stories and new literature. When Don grub rgyal started writing short stories, this settled any doubt about the capacity of the Tibetan language for writing modern literature. Reading his stories and poems, young Tibetans were encouraged to write themselves and the number of Tibetan writers increased.

GT: Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

PB: These days, if one can find the money, then there is more chance to publish his or her work. But along with the chance to publish more good books, there is also the chance ot publish poor-quality books. In any case, publishing has increased a lot in recent years. Some people consider Ljang bu, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, Byams pa dge legs, Skabs chen bde grol to be good new writers. 'Ju skal bzang wrote nice poetry, merging traditional and modern free verse, but it seems he has not been publishing new works recently. For short story writers, there are Tshe ring don grub, Stag 'bum rgyal, and Bkra shis dpal ldan (whose two novels I really enjoyed). The problem with some writings is that after a few pages you can see who the author is imitating. Some lines are written very well and I can feel the author's personality. But then he cannot sustain it. Suddenly he tries to be like classical *Inji* (English) writers or like Lu Xun and that's when the work loses quality. It's really bumpy.

GT: What are your current writing projects?

PB: My current project is also a project from a long time ago. I have started writing the biography of my teacher during the Cultural Revolution. These days my life depends on my Tibetan language. I have, I think, at least lots of Tibetan people feel, that my Tibetan language is a little stronger, and I feel the same way. As I mentioned earlier, this foundation is thanks to him. I drafted this work two or three years ago; it actually became my memoir of the Cultural Revolution. But before I got to mention the teacher, I mentioned Mao's *Red Book*. Starting off with Mao's *Red Book*, I tracked off onto the Cultural Revolution. I put the teacher's biography aside and followed my memory. Recently, I restarted the biography and finished a draft in seven days. These days I am editing, adding some more memories. I think I can finish this month. Last month, I worked together with my colleagues, Kristina Dy-Liacco, the news editor, Sonam Dhargay, who did layout and design, and my wife Lauran Hartley as the literary editor, on the first issue of Latse Library Newsletter. I think we did a great job. I

translated from English two poems written by a Tibetan woman, Tsering Wangmo Dhompa, who now lives in California.

GT: Her poems were written in English?

PB: Yes, originally published in English. Also, I translated one article, "What is World Literature?" into Tibetan. Last year, I wrote a short story about Tibetan life in New York based on two couples' lives in New York. I have finished an article on *sgrung glu*, a kind of drinking song, in which you ask a question and give the answer, for example, about how the world was formed, or the question: "How did the beak of this bird become red?" The answer: "A cow was killed and the bird stole his blood. If you don't believe me, look at his beak". There are hundreds of these. One well-known Chinese scholar who in the 1970s wrote about Tibetan literary history was the first to mention this genre, saying that this was primitive (*yuanshi*) Tibetan literature, this shows the Tibetan mind is not mature, a kid's mind, seeing the world so simply. And Tibetans accept this view. But how can we judge how old this literature is? With stone artifacts, if you have some skill maybe you can date their age. But still, if I send this article or other works to Dharamsala, the audience is so limited. Even if you print 500 copies, nobody buys them. Still, I feel someday we will publish them.

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